

MODELING CHRIST IN MARRIAGE

Ephesians 5:22-33



In the old Disney movie *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* an evil queen walks up to a mirror and asks the mirror a question. “*Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?*” No doubt expecting to see herself, she becomes quite upset that it is not her, but Snow White. It’s interesting because when you look into a mirror, you expect to see yourself.

But from the beginning, in Genesis 1, we are told that God created man in His own image, like a mirror designed to reflect Him. We’re His image-bearers. Every man and woman reflects something of God’s nature and characteristics that are distinct from the rest of creation (fish/bird/beast/plant). We were made for relationships and specifically designed to communicate with God through a spiritual frequency with mind, emotion, will. And as believers, we have been created anew in Christ with the intention of reflecting Christ. When we look into the mirror, or people look at us, we want them to see mirrored, Jesus Christ.

Last time, we talked about modeling Christ through our relationships with love, forgiveness, kindness, and constructive speech (4:26-5:2). Today, we are going to talk about how the marriage relationship takes modeling Christ to an even deeper level. Just because you aren’t married, doesn’t mean you can tune out because most people here will get married. You want to learn ahead of time, like reading the operator’s manual before operating the car. It also makes a good Father’s Day message because one of the best things you can give your children is a healthy marriage. When they see their mom and dad put emphasis on their marriage, it produces stability in them and no doubt, will shape their view of marriage (whether they see it as dreadful or beautiful).

And this is important because for us to talk about because the home is the most difficult place to model Christ.



The most difficult & critical place to model Christ: in the home.

You can’t fake a Christian walk at home like you can on Sunday morning. Who you are at home is who you really are. If you want to measure your spiritual growth most accurately, measure it at home. And we might look more at this next week with modeling Christ through parenting, but it’s also critical because...



The home is a legacy factory.¹

God’s plan from the beginning was for homes to be a legacy factory. The marriage and family is central to God’s design and plan for humanity and ensuring the spiritual legacy of the next generation. I would even say it’s the primary institution because it’s the first one God created and even the functions of the church are highly affected by what goes on in the home life. Moms and dads, not the church, are to be the primary disciple makers of the next generation. Parenting is discipleship. It’s the most powerful place where legacies

are formed. And there's possibly no greater thing we can do to pass on the baton of a spiritual inheritance than by modeling Christ & the Church in our home through marriage. Our marriages, you will see, are like powerful seminaries for teaching our kids about God.

One of the things I'm desperately wanting to instill in us through this series is a conscious awareness of this incredible reality that, consciously or unconsciously, we are passing on a legacy to those we are around the most. And we want to be intentional about it like passing a baton. If you've ever run in a relay race like this you know how much work and practice it takes to make for a smooth passing of the baton. You must be intentional about it. If you aren't, you will lose the race or you will fumble it terribly. We want to be intentional and marriage is one of the greatest relationships in this life to be intentional in.

Ephesians 5:22-33

“Wives, subject yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are parts of His body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, as for you individually, each husband is to love his own wife the same as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.”

Now, before we dive into the text, we need to remind ourselves of the context because it's going to help give us a proper foundation for the application and encourage us to apply it.

1 st Half – Chapters 1-3	2 nd Half – Chapters 4-6
Indicatives – Spiritual Realities/Truths	Imperatives - Commands
Orthodoxy	Orthopraxy
Doctrine	Duty
Calling	Conduct
Who you are in Christ (1:3)	How you walk worthily in Christ (4:1)

At the end of each of the first three chapters, there are 3 major indicatives.ⁱⁱ

- **Indicative #1 – Christ’s Headship over His Body, the Church.**
Eph. 1:22 – *“He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”*
- **Indicative #2 – The unity of Christ’s Body.**
Eph. 2:19-22 talks about how in Christ we are all members of God’s household, being built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, being fitted together as a holy temple. One hope, one faith, one baptism, one Lord over all, and in all.
- **Indicative #3 – The glory the Body gives the Head (from where it also gets its power).**
Eph. 3:20, Paul says, *“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church in Jesus Christ*

to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” Just like the structure of Romans 11, Paul goes into a worshipful doxology before he transitions from doctrine to duty, based on the doctrine.

If you take these indicatives into consideration as you come to chapter 5 and the worthy walk being commanded (4:1), both husband and wife must admit that it’s really not about them but about something more glorious than them. A greater picture... and that is them, as the Body(Church), giving glory to the Head (Christ) through their unity. Bringing the commands to submit and to love into this context radically takes the focus off of us and our wills, and plugs it into the heavenly mission and will of glorifying Christ.

There are a million counselors out there in the world with countless marriage books written and countless tips and advice. The problem is most of them are earthly & unfounded. They haven’t taken into consideration the heavenly calling that marriage is. They don’t understand the heavenly design and heeded the heavenly counsel. This is what Ephesians is teaching. We are a heavenly people (1:3) with a heavenly calling and we need heavenly counsel. That takes us to our first “mirror”.

 **By obeying the imperatives, we are *reflecting* the heavenly indicatives.**

As His obedient Body, we are modeling Christ to the world. And I’m just praying that the Church wakes up to this because the earthly way of doing marriage clearly isn’t working. And my heart breaks for marriages.

It’s no wonder there’s so much pessimism against marriage today when over half of marriages end in divorce – even Christian marriages. I’ve heard people say, “*Marriage is just a big expensive party,*” or “*I’ll never get married because I don’t know any happily married couples*”. If you tell someone you’re happily married, they look at you like you’re delusional and trying to deceive yourself. Many are pessimistic for good reason. They’ve seen the hurt caused by ungodly marriages. When you get married, you’re really opening yourself up to new depths of transparency which means you’re opening yourself up to new depths of hurt. But here’s the thing: most people, including those who are married, have never understood the deeper meaning of marriage God planned from the beginning. They’ve not read the instruction manual.

Illustration: Instruction Manual. I mean, what’s the first thing you do when you buy something? As you’re opening it, you throw the manufacturer’s manual to the side and you see if you can assemble it and operate it on your own. *Only when you run into problems do you reach for the manual* and begin to assemble it and operate it *by faith trusting that the manufacturer knows what they’re talking about since they designed it*. It’s the same with marriage. Most people don’t reach for the manual – the Bible – until they run into serious problems and they learn to do it God’s way by faith.

One of the greatest things we can do to help marriages today is to help them understand the foundational concepts it reflects going all the way back to Genesis. Paul points out that marriage is something **grounded in the original order of creation and even before creation**. Think about this for a second: The spiritual realm existed before the physical realm, and so *when God went to create the physical, He created it to illustrate and teach spiritual truths*. Revelation 13:8 “*The lamb [Christ] was slain from before the creation of the world*” which tells us that He designed lambs to illustrate spiritual truths about Christ. When he created the human body, he designed the head to be the protector and provider for the rest of the body, ultimately picturing Christ & the Church. It wasn’t like Christ stepped into this world and said, “Oh, there’s a great illustration for what my relationship is like with my people.” No, He knew He would gather a people called the Church and pre-creation, designed it to reflect that.

 **The Husband and wife mirror Christ and the Church.**

The relationship of Christ to the Church came before marriage in the mind of God. Paul calls it a mystery and quotes Genesis 2:24, “*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*” This mystery is great,” he says, “*but I am referring to Christ and the Church.*” Christ left His Father to come and be joined to His bride through His sacrifice. It’s a deep, analogical mystery most will never understand.

Think about this too: *Adam was created first, from the dust*, right? But what about Eve? Well after some time of Adam naming the animals and realizing he was alone, God said it wasn’t good for man to be alone and created Eve. But how did he create *Eve? Not from the dust, but from Adam’s side* (from one of his ribs – which miraculously grow back when removed properly by the way). He prizes her as bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh and the two were joined together to become one flesh (Gen. 2:23-24). She came from him and was made for him. Sound familiar? Through Christ’s giving of Himself, we came to be from Him and for Him. This is what the husband and wife are to mirror: grand and glorious realities about God and His people.

While we here, I also like to teach that based on Genesis 1:26-27 that marriage reflects the Trinity.

 **Marriage mirrors God’s triune plurality and oneness.**

It wasn’t good for man to be alone because he’s made in the image of God – being *a relational being* as God is a relational being. God is by His very nature a relational being: 3 Persons in 1. And already in Genesis you pick up on that when you read it closely.

“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness”

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“In the image of God He created him [Mankind]; Male and female He created them... bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh...the two shall become one flesh.”

So you have this plurality and oneness in the Godhead but then also in the formation and marriage of Adam and Eve. They are two but Eve is created from Adam to be joined (glued) together with him. Adam and Eve have plurality and oneness. The fact that we model God’s nature and what His relationship to His people is like, should be two of the greatest incentives for doing marriage God’s way.

But now we need to get into the specific roles. And I’ll remind you, I don’t write the mail, I just deliver it.ⁱⁱⁱ

 **The wife is to mirror the Church’s submission to Christ.**

Just to make that a little more palatable for the women who think their role as the Body is unfair, remember, women model someone who is redeemed and men model someone who dies! In all seriousness, there is a lot of confusion about this passage because some read it and think well, “*God just wants me to be a door mat my husband can walk on,*” or they think of women in a dominated Muslim culture. Submission is not subjugation. It is not saying that she no longer has a voice or an opinion or that she’s less valuable.

Some women read “*obey your husband in everything*” and will inevitably, understandably, ask, “What if he tells me to do something God forbids?” Well, clearly, a husband is not to forbid what God commands and command what God forbids. If he does, you obey God, not man. The same goes for kids to their parents, slaves to their owners, citizens to government. But other than that, why does it say everything? Because it’s not about you, but about **unity** that glorifies Jesus’. If there’s two wills trying to be the head, there’s going to be a battle – selfish ambition and evil practice – not meekness (James 4).

Just this last week while I was on vacation, someone texted me (not from here) and asked if these instructions still applied or if it was just some passing cultural thing.

1. **It's not cultural, but theological.**

This goes back before culture started, to the creation of Adam and Eve. God created them in order for a reason – first Adam then Eve from Adam. Paul emphasized that in 1 Cor. 11:3, 8. This is a glorious theological picture from the get-go.

2. **It's not personal, but practical.**

In every social institution, made up of people, there has to be authority and submission or else there will be chaos. There is headship in every family, every business, every organization, every local church (men serve as elders; Titus 1; 1 Tim. 3) and even in the Trinity. When there is good leadership and good submission, **everyone benefits** from it.

It's not a value thing, but a harmony thing. Think of it like **dancing**.^{iv} If both try to lead, it's a disaster and they trip and stumble and butt heads. But when one leads, who was designed to lead, she completes him and the dance is such a beautiful thing. You can *dance or dispute*. Complete or compete. "Anything with 2 competing heads," Voddie Baucham said, "*is a monster*." And they end up putting it behind glass as and people pay to come and see it.^v

Don't forget too, that this entire **section** is full of submission commands, not just for women. In verse 21 he says to the church as a whole is to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ – believers to each other. In chapter 6, it's children to their parents and slaves to their masters – "*as to the Lord*," or "*as to Christ*" (5:22, 6:5).

And think about this: even in the **Trinity** itself, there is order and roles. The Father planned salvation, the Son carried it out in submission to the Father, then He send the Spirit to apply salvation to our hearts (Jn. 16:7). *Does the fact that there are different roles in the Trinity make either one of them less valuable or worthy of praise?* No. **It's not about value but about order & unity & function.** Though there's differing roles, Paul points out in elsewhere we're both made in God's image and dependent on each other (1 Cor. 11:11). Peter says we are both heirs of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7).

3. **It's not forced, but voluntary.**

Accepting the proposal is voluntary and so is her submission to his lead throughout the marriage out of submission to Christ. He doesn't force her. I love the example of Sarah and Abraham that Peter gives in 1 Peter 3. God calls him to leave the land of Canaan and she willingly follows that call. They've been a great model for me and my wife. God called me into pastoral ministry but my wife and I move together as I communicate the call and we patiently pray through it together.

And another neat verse in that portion of Scripture about this admonition for wives is that if by faith you apply it, you may just win the love of your husband you want. 1 Peter 3:1 says, "*be submissive to your husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior*." Even if they are disobedient to the word...

Our last mirror is the husband's:

The husband is to mirror Christ's love for the Church.

Basically, we get to die to ourselves and live for our wives. This is where the women say, “*Amen!*”. You can’t get a *higher standard* of love than this. We model a man who was completely selfless and others-centered to the point of death. And our *warning* is that if we abuse our authority, not modeling Christ, not living with our wife in an understanding way, 1 Peter 3:7 says our prayers will be hindered.

But men, this is what women are looking for. Like one man said, “*She wants a man she can look up to, whose judgment she can respect, and whose leadership she can respond to. If she does not get this in her man, she feels cheated.*” But I want to encourage the women who want that: *please give your man the opportunity to lead.* If you want him to be a man of God who leads well, let him know that and don’t secretly try to lead the dance. A lot of guys come across as passive because they don’t want to look chauvinistic by assuming leadership. So tell him you want him to be a spiritual leader in your home. You want him to grow in Christ as a leader; you want him to lead in the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

Women want someone strong, but tender-hearted men like Christ. Someone who will put God first. And then the marriage, and then the kids. Someone who **protect, purify, provide for and prize her.**

1. Husbands are to protect their wives like Christ does the Church. (v. 27).

Christ protects us from the wrath of God we deserve for our sins by wrapping us up in his righteousness, presenting us to him in glory without spot or wrinkle, holy and blameless. That’s what love says: “*I will guard you, protect you, keep you from evil, provide for you, share with you, listen to you, pray with you, live the truth for you.*” All of that is part of physical, spiritual, and emotional/mental protection. Just listening to and praying for your wife offering spiritual and emotional protection. Protect them more than physically. You heard about the wife who said to her husband, “*I understand that you would die for me, throwing yourself in front a bullet. But while you’re waiting to die, could you spend some time helping me with dishes?*”^{vi}

2. Husbands are to purify their wives like Christ does the Church. (v. 26)

Our wives, through our model of Christ, are supposed to become more like Christ, more sanctified as a result of having been married to us. And if a man loves his wife, he’s not going to use his authority to crush her or stifle her or frustrate her by trying to make her something that she isn’t. John Stott said, “*His love for her will lead him to an exactly opposite path. He will give himself up for her, in order that she may develop her full potential under God and so become more completely herself” as God uniquely created her to be.*” He wants his wife flourish in Christ.

3. Husbands are to provide for their wives like Christ provides for the Church. (vv. 28-29)

Christ nourishes His Church, provides for His Church, through the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts and His perfect assembly of the Body. Men are also the providers. And we should seek to provide for our wives more than just physically. Story was told of a couple in counseling where the husband was frustratingly said, “*I don’t understand it. I have given you everything a woman could want. I’ve given you a nice house. I’ve given you a car. I’ve given you all the clothes you can wear. I’ve given you...*” The list went on. When the man ended she said, “*Yes, that much is true. You have given me everything... but yourself.*” Provide you wife with the love she longs for.

4. Husbands are to prize their wives like Christ prizes the Church. (v.29)

This comes from the word cherish in verse 29. Cherish your wives more than the job, the hobby, the kids... because the reality is that one day you won’t have that job and the kids will move out, but what must remain is the marriage just as what remains throughout eternity is marriage to Christ.

You know whenever this passage is read, men want to say, “*Amen!*” when talking about the wives, and the women want to say, “*Amen!*” when talking about the husband’s duty. And that’s understandable but the challenge in verse 33 is for each individual to do what they’ve been called to do. I like what Larry Moyer said in his devotional.



Focus on being the right mate, not finding the right mate.^{vii} (5:33)

The secret is not finding the right mate but by being the right mate, making it easier for your mate to live with you.

And let’s think about this as we come to communion: communion is a mirror of Christ’s sacrifice for us, through which He purchased His Bride. And it’s a reminder to celebrate that, but also to walk worthily of the sacrifice. As the Bride, we make ourselves ready, according to the power at work in us (Eph. 3:20-21). Revelation 19:7 says, “*Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.*”

ⁱ Family Life Today, *Dennis Rainey’s Legacy*, 26 May 2021.

ⁱⁱ Voddie Baucham, Family Life Today, *The Value of Submission*, June 18, 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ Baucham.

^{iv} Barbara Rainey, Family Life Today, *The Heart of Submission*, November 7, 2013.

^v Baucham.

^{vi} James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988, 1997), 201.

^{vii} Larry Moyer, *31 Days to Contagious Living: A Daily Devotional Guide on Modeling Christ to Others* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000), 29-31.