

March 23, 2014

# God's Power for Marriage

Ephesians 5:1 – 2, 15 – 21

We've been looking at what God has to say about marriage in the Bible, and we've looked at God's Plan for Marriage, and God's Purpose for Marriage, and this week we'll look at God's Power for marriage. And in Ephesians five where Paul lays out the plan and purpose of marriage, we see it all come into focus in verse 32: *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.* In other words, the hidden counsel of God, the mystery of marriage, is that it is designed to reflect and display the essence of the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church. And in the present age and culture we find ourselves in today, we cannot say often enough that **marriage is a model of Christ and the church.**

God's plan for marriage was to have a covenant promise relationship between one man and one woman that reflects God's unilateral covenant of grace with us. That is, **marriage is meant to point to and display the covenant of grace between Christ and His church.** That is why Paul points out that *Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* Ephesians 5:26-27 Christ made a covenant promise that wasn't based on what we could do or what we brought into this thing. We were hostile to Him – He said, 'I'll die for you'. We were dirty and stained – He said, 'I'll wash you clean'. We had all kinds of hidden and not-so-hidden blemishes – He said, 'I'll make you holy'.

Because **the grand design for marriage is that we might be sanctified** – made spotless, wrinkle-free, and unblemished. He comes in to change what is twisted, blemished and stained in our lives. He's bound Himself by a covenant promise to sanctify us – make us holy – to take what is unattractive and ugly and make it radiant and beautiful. And we're told that's the purpose of marriage. This passage inextricably links the two ideas. Your spouse comes into your life, not to be your Savior, but to partner with the Savior – to help make you into the person that Christ died to make you to be.

Paul doesn't really give us any details about how this happens except to say two things – wives submit to your own husbands and husbands love your wives with the kind of sacrificial love Christ has for His bride. I would like to spend just a little more time on these two things – respectful submission and sacrificial love, because, as this passage makes clear, these two things are at the heart of marriage.

I think one of the best explanations of Biblical submission is found in 1 Peter 3: *Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external--the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear-- but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women **who hoped in God** used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.* **1 Peter 3:1-6**

The **essence of submission is the fact that it is based on hope in God and not your husband.** Wives, submit to your husbands – **as to the Lord** because you hope in Him and not your husband. Wives, don't hope in your husband to bring you happiness – don't hope in him to fulfill you – don't hope in him to somehow make your life complete – **hope in God.** This is how holy women submit to their husbands. It is hard to be in submission to your husband if your hope is in him – because he will more than likely do something to shatter that hope. But God never fails – never makes mistakes – never does the wrong thing. Hope in God who alone has the power to change your husband. Hope in God who alone has the power to deliver you from unreasonable demands. Hope in God who knows your situation better than you do and is lovingly orchestrating the details of your life.

**Submission makes you beautiful.** *For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.* Because marriage was designed to sanctify you, submission to your own husband has the effect of making you pretty. And I don't know any woman who doesn't want to be considered pretty. Peter deliberately contrasts the outward attempts at beautification – hair, jewelry, clothes – with the inward beauty of submission. Godly submission to your husband will beautify the whole person – not just your skin, because submission to your husband was designed to make you spotless and wrinkle-free. Submission to your husband will deal with all those unholy areas in your life that need to be made holy in a way that creams and cosmetics and hair color will not.

And furthermore Peter argues, **submission works transformation.** Living a submitted life will change that wretch of a husband you've been complaining about. *so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.* Wives, when you are submitting to your husband as to the Lord, what your husbands see is this beautiful being who looks like Jesus, and the more they see Jesus, the more their hearts are softened and changed and eventually they are won to Him. Essentially Peter is saying 'Wives, submission not only beautifies you and sanctifies you, it will work to change your husband'.

The other half of this beautiful picture is husbands loving their wives: *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her,* Ephesians 5:22-25 Husbands, take your cue on how to be a husband from Christ. The way Christ loves the church is the very same way you are to love your wife. Christ did not love the church simply because the church was lovely or love-worthy. Verses 26-27 tell us that Christ loved the church when she was unlovely **because** the goal of Christ's love was to sanctify her and cleanse her of spots and wrinkles and blemishes. Sacrificial love has the effect of not only sanctifying us, but also the object of our love.

**Real husband-love is a self-denying love.** That is, it is sacrificing your selfish pleasure to bring joy to your wife, because her pleasure *is* your highest joy. Good husbands look for ways to please their wives. They study them to know what makes them happy – what turns their crank. It is a wholly other-centered love that puts her interests first. That is how Christ loved the church. He knew that our highest joy and pleasure would be to be with Him forever so He went to the cross for us – He suffered and died for us – to make us alive and bring us joy. And this sacrificial love is actually the husbands joy. That is, your real joy and satisfaction lies in loving your wife sacrificially, not in pleasing yourself.

Paul emphasizes this in verse 28 and 29: *In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of His body.* Ephesians 5:28-30 By nature we love ourselves, even those who say they don't – they really do. Because the nature of loving yourself means that you do what gives you joy. There is not much the natural man will do if in some sense the doing does not bring him some measure of happiness. So the word tells us that if we love our wives, that means we love ourselves and that means that loving our wives gives us great joy. So just as Christ sought His own joy in the joy of His bride – **husbands seek your joy in the joy of your bride.** Husbands, if you devote yourselves to the holy joy of your wife – you will not only bring her joy and fill yourself with joy, you will be changed and she will be changed and your marriage will reflect the image of the heavenly.

And about this time everyone is wondering, 'If this is what marriage is about, how in the world can we do this?' Good question. This is what the rest of this message is about. Let's look at the text we read this morning: *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God...Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, **but be filled with the Spirit,** addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.* Ephesians 5:1-2; 15-21

What we need to do this thing called marriage is the **power of the Holy Spirit.** You see this whole passage about marriage begins with the command 'Be imitators of God and walk in love just like Christ'.

And then Paul goes on to talk about what this doesn't look like and he gets down to verse 18 and says 'Don't walk like unwise men but wise – redeem the time and **be filled with the Spirit**'. And then all of a sudden he gets to verse 22 and starts talking about marriage – without any kind of transition. You would expect that we are on a different subject now – but there is no transition because Paul is still talking about being imitators of God and walking in love just like Christ. Paul doesn't make any transition **because he's still on the same subject**. He doesn't really end until verse 9 in chapter 6. Paul says 'Let your lives imitate the life of Christ'. And he talks about marriage and children and parenting and slaves and masters. And the only way to imitate Christ in every arena of life, is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Essentially Paul is saying a marriage will only work well if you assume the filling of the Holy Spirit.

So what does that look like? **What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit** in a way that makes your marriage reflect the relationship between Christ and the church? If you look in John 16, Jesus tells His disciples that when the Holy Spirit comes, He will take what you know of Me and He will glorify Me. The Holy Spirit's job, as it were, is to take what we know of Christ and apply it experientially to our lives. Do you know that Jesus died for your sins? Do you know that He loved you before you even thought of Him? Do you know that He overcame sin and death and hell so that He might bring you to the Father? Have you embraced the gospel? The Holy Spirit takes what Jesus did on the cross and makes it alive to you. **He takes the gospel and makes it real** in you. You grasp it. You suddenly begin to know how wide and how high and how far and how deep His love for you really is.

And that knowing becomes a blazing fire in your heart that causes you to sing and make melody in your heart to God and you are filled with a deep, deep thankfulness for everything because all at once you know that this love with which you are eternally loved by God, only wants the best for you. And we are astonished and staggered by His amazing grace. And even the hard things, the troublesome things, the tragic things, those difficult marriages, all those things that don't make sense now will one day all be crystal clear, and we will see the imprint of our loving Lord's hands all over our lives.

Being filled with the Spirit is not a one-time affair. A good translation of verse 18 that doesn't work well in English but makes perfect sense in Greek is '**...be being filled with the Spirit**'. That is, being filled with the Spirit is a continual, ongoing process. The Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is always taking what you know of Christ and making it real in your experience. Paul is talking about having your souls bubbling over with the real life experience of God's love; and unless you know God's love, experientially, powerfully in your life, you will not actually be able to do what you should do in marriage. Wives, you're supposed to give your husbands your respectful submission – Husbands, you're supposed to give your wives a sacrificial love. **But you cannot give away what you do not first possess.**

There is no way you will ever be able to come to the place of respectful submission and sacrificial love, walking together through thick and thin, through conflicts and reconciliation, through times of difficulty and trouble, to where that initial spark of ego-centric thrill turns into deep and lasting love and respect unless you first possess, experientially, the love of God poured out in your heart. If your spouse is the main source of love and happiness in your life, if God is not your real source of love and joy and meaning, then when your spouse stops giving you the love he or she should give you, when they criticize you or they go through a rough time and seem distant and cold, you're going to melt down. You know why? **You can only keep giving love as long as you're getting it.** And if you keep giving but not getting, eventually you're empty and your marriage is empty and you give up. You don't have another source. You've depended upon your spouse to be your source and they fall short. And things break down and you go looking for chemistry somewhere else.

But what if you have an inexhaustible supply of love? What if you are continually filled with the kind of love and respect that fuels a good marriage? You need to be filled. You need to be filled with the Spirit – continually, daily, even hourly. If your soul is filled with the real life experience of God's love, you'll be able to give love even during those times in your marriage where your spouse is not giving you the love or respect that he or she should. Wives, if you are going to God to be filled with His Spirit, then submission will not be an issue even when your husband is a jerk. Because the Holy Spirit will fill you with submission to God and that will overflow to your husband. Husbands, if God is your source and not your wife, then sacrificial love bubbles over on her, even when she doesn't deserve it. Because that's the kind of love that God pours into your hearts through the Holy Spirit.

So where does that come from? **How do we get filled?** Look at verse 18 and 19: *but be filled with the Spirit, [speaking to] one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.* Being filled with the Spirit comes from the gospel. It comes from the Holy Spirit making the gospel real in our lives. The grammar here makes it clear that being filled with the Spirit happens *while* we are meditating on and speaking the truth of the gospel to ourselves and one another. And as we do that the Holy Spirit takes what we know of Christ and applies it to our minds and hearts and lives. He fills us with the reality of what we know so that love and submission are not just duties we owe to our spouse, they bubble over onto our spouse.

**Marriage is a model of Christ and the church.** Look at the staggering, amazing spousal love of Christ. He was the perfect husband. He didn't abandon us when we turned against Him. He didn't say as so many of us say, 'Well you're not being the spouse you should be so I'm not going to be the spouse I should be'. No, He came to a people who were blemished and stained by sin and rebellion, and instead of leaving us to our destiny, He stood by His covenant and sacrificed Himself for our sakes. When He was up there on the cross, seeing our betrayal, our mocking, our denying, our killing Him, in one of the greatest acts of spousal faithfulness – He stayed. And through His death came resurrection, and healing and wholeness. When you realize experientially His submission to His Father's will, to the point of death, you will know a glad submission to your husband. If you really know that Christ loved you enough to die for you, you will love your wife as Christ loved the church. But you have to have the reality of the gospel in your soul for that to happen.

If God is the source of your joy and love and meaning, if you are being continually filled with the Spirit, if the gospel is alive to you, then it doesn't really matter what your spouse does or what they are like. You will have the same kind of sacrificial love Christ had for His church for them. You will have the same attitude of respectful submission that Jesus had for His Father for them. When you're living out the gospel, you love your spouse and submit to your spouse not so much because they're lovely or worthy, but to make them lovely and worthy.

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

As we come to the table this morning, let it speak to you of the power of the cross where Jesus died to take sin-stained, blemished and unworthy people and wash them clean and spotless through His blood. Let it remind you of the power of God to change and transform sinners into saints. Let it sing to you of the power of the Holy Spirit to make the truth of the gospel real in your life and in your marriage, and to make God the source of your love and joy and meaning.

*Our gracious God and Father,*

*Thank You for this incredible picture of marriage that You purposed and planned for us. Jesus thank You for the your perfect example of spousal submission and love. Don't let us be content with a smaller, meaner view of marriage that corrupts the beauty and delight You planned for us. Holy Spirit grant to us the power to live and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. Come and fill us up and let the truth of the gospel change us. Let our lives and our marriages testify to Your saving, transforming power, and reflect all the riches and love of our covenant-making God, we pray in the powerful name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*