

## Imitating Christ's Love in Marriage

In Ephesians 5&6 Paul uses typical first century Greco-Roman household structures to exhort individuals to emulate Christ's love for the church.

- Husbands & Wives
- Fathers & Children
- Slaves & Owners
- Paul is not arguing that these 1st century roles are God's plan for man. No one today believes that slavery is godly. He simply addressed people in their current condition, and how they could demonstrate Christ's love in their given relationships. Marriage in itself is not a guarantee for human flourishing. Treating each other as Christ loves the church is the mystery leading to human flourishing--being happy and fulfilled.

### Ephesians 5:21-33

#### MARRIAGE ROLES

- Wedding of all kinds
- Most marriage books make sweeping generalizations about the differences between men and women.
- I have almost never met this generic couple.
- [Life can't be reduced to a formula; its a mystery.](#)
- Before addressing the familiar gender roles of the household, Apostle Paul wrote in verse 21, "submitting to one another in the fear of the Lord."
- Men and women are all different. Submission to authority is not the subject of this passage. Loving as Christ loves the church is the theme.
- You and I are called to this kind of love in every relationship and position we find ourselves in. Many times I am called to lead. Others times I am required to be a good team member. The Golden Rule applies every time.
- [The point is not to emphasize the holiness of this household structure, but rather to admonish Christians to imitate Christ whoever they may stand in the sociological pecking order.](#)
- Men are told to be kind to their slaves, gentle with their children and loving with their wives.
- Slaves are admonished to work well with ultimate allegiance to God, and with the suffering of Christ as a comfort in their affliction.

#### CHRIST EXALTING MARRIAGE

- When spouses serve one another rather than fight one another, we catch a glimpse of the mystery of Christ's self-giving love for the church, and the consummation of the love that is to come.
- [Marriage is not an inherently holy institution. It cannot be made so by the state or by the church. Marriage is made holy by a husband and a wife reflecting the life-giving, self-sacrificing love of Jesus.](#)
- I can fix every bad marriage. Treat one another like Christ treats the church.
- Your marriage, as well as all other relationships, businesses, organizations and churches give Christians the opportunity to reflect the grace, love, joy and peace of the Kingdom of God, however imperfectly.

- Your marriage will never fully reflect Christ and the church. Philippians 3:13-14, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."
- I am a better husband than I used to be. I am a better father than I used to be. I am a better pastor than I used to be. I am a better friend than I used to be. I am pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
- When two people for a lifetime commit to mutual love and submission in imitation of Christ something wonderful and mysterious results. It is the closest thing on earth we have that looks like Christ's love for the church.
- A sacrament is found in common things made holy by setting them apart for God's recognition and blessing. Bread and wine were the common every day simple meal for first century Middle Eastern people. It was made holy when offered with thanksgiving to God in remembrance of Christ's body and blood. A simple pool of water is made holy when a person enters in to participate and embody Christ's death and resurrection. Marriage is similarly a sacrament only when a man and a woman submit to one another in the fear of the Lord and commit every day to loving one another as Christ loves the church.
- There is something about the tension and longing of romantic love of a husband and wife that reminds us of our desire for God and his desire for us.

#### **OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES**

- Jeremiah 24:7, "Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart."
- Song of Solomon 2:16; 4:9-15

#### **Discussion Guide**

Read Ephesians 5:18-21

- What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?
- How important are other people in being filled with the Spirit?
- What does it mean to be submitted to one another in the fear of the Lord?

Read Ephesians 5:22-33

- Christ and the church is the theme of this passage. How does this influence your interpretation of the passage?
- Self-sacrificial love is the mystery. How do we love one another as Christ loves the church?
- Describe a marriage that you believe reflects Christ's love for the church?
- How should this description influence your marriage or other relationships?
- How much better would life be if we live and love the way Christ loves the church?