

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## God's Plan for Marriage

### *Biblical Marriage Part 1*

Today the institution of marriage has fallen on hard times. The divorce rates both in and outside of the church is fifty percent or more. Society endorses immorality, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, sterilization, abortion, sexual rebellion, and women's liberation. The thought of marriage is frightening, and for many, it is outright rejected. One man put it this way:

“Our troubled generation staggers along in the darkness of... broken relationships like a drunk in the night. Here and there it clings to a lamppost, which dispels a little of the blackness, but rarely does it ever find the full, warm sunlight and sobriety of God's intended joy”<sup>1</sup>

Now this scene is not because there is no help being offered. In fact it is the opposite. There are psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, and sociologists both inside and outside the church that offer a massive library of suggestions and solutions. Yet marital problems only seem to increase. In fact, never before has the church had so much “help” when it comes to marriage, and yet struggled so much to stay married. This is why when we look at the modern scene we easily can lose hope when it comes to having a “good” marriage.

We hold in our hands God's manual on all of life — including the marriage relationship. This gives us great hope. God made man and woman. He is the author of marriage.<sup>2</sup> He knows the complexities and difficulties that are associated with the marriage relationship. And thus, we only need to look to God and His word to find the answer for any question, including the issue of marriage.

But there is a problem. The generation in which we live is Biblically illiterate. We do not live according to God's Word. And that is why it is no surprise to see that Marriage has fallen on rough times. Our generation has turned their back on God!

From all of this I hope you see that what is needed in the church today is not another book, therapist, or retreat. Rather, we need reformation. We need a renewal when it comes to submitting our lives to God's word.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. John MacArthur, *The Family*, Page 7

<sup>2</sup> Compare Genesis 2

Let us turn afresh to God's Word and discover — maybe for the first time — God's plan for marriage.

## **Prerequisites to Biblical Marriage**

Ephesians 5:15-21, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”

Ephesians 5:15-21 serves as the preface to Paul's discussion on marriage. It is the foundation or the prerequisites to marriage. This is best seen if we look at the text backwards.

In Ephesians 5:22-23 Paul discusses God's plan for marriage. It is a written explanation of what is meant in verse 21 and our call to mutually submit one to another. From this we conclude that mutual submission is a prerequisite to a Biblical marriage.

Yet, mutual submission in verse 21 is a product of the Spirit filled life referenced in verse 18. From this we can conclude that a Spirit filled life is also a prerequisite to a Biblical marriage.

And yet, the Spirit filled life of verse 18 can only come after the salvation referenced in verses 14 and 15. We therefore must conclude that salvation is a prerequisite to a Biblical marriage.

God's plan for marriage rests upon a foundation. That foundation is found in verses 15 -21 and it is the prerequisite to a Biblical marriage. Let us examine each prerequisite that Paul assumes in his discussion of God's plan for marriage.

## **Salvation**

Ephesians 3:15, “**See then that ye walk circumspectly**, not as fools, but as wise.”

This verse calls us to look at verse 14. It is saying because of the truths previously stated see that you walk circumspectly.

Ephesians 3:14, “Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”

The non-Christian is one who is sleeping in the darkness of Sin. When a person turns to Christ, Christ enters into his life and shines in and through them. It is this appeal, or call to salvation, that serves as the basis of the whole passage.<sup>3</sup> Salvation is the foundation from which Paul talks about marriage.

If a woman is going to fulfill her call in Ephesians 5:22-24 she must first be redeemed. If a man is going to fulfill his call in Ephesians 5:25-33 he too must be saved by the cross of Christ.

This should be fairly obvious if we understand our fallen condition. When Adam sinned in the Garden shortly after his creation, God placed this curse upon the woman.

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<sup>3</sup> i.e., Ephesians 5:15 – 6:9

Genesis 3:16, “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; **and thy desire<sup>4</sup> shall be to thy husband**, and he shall rule over thee.”

The word *desire* comes from the Arabic root that means to compel, impel, urge, or seek control over. As such, it doesn't reference a sexual or psychological yearning, but a longing to dominate. In fact, the next time this word is used in the Bible, it is found in Genesis 4:6-7.

Genesis 4:6-7, “And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.”

Because of sin's curse, the natural “desire” of every woman is the domination of their spouse. The base desire — the fleshly desire — of every married woman is to usurp the place of her husband's role as head.<sup>5</sup>

In Genesis 3:16 we read of sin's curse upon the man.

Genesis 3:16, “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, **and he shall rule<sup>6</sup> over thee.**”

The word *rule* is not the same word used in Genesis 1:28 where God calls man to rule over the earth. Genesis 1 is the gentle *rule* of stewardship where man is to take care of God's creation. Rather the word used here is a despotic kind of authoritarianism. It is a rule that may include destruction and devastation.<sup>7</sup>

The portrait painted in Genesis 3 is that of a man and women set against each other in the futile war of domination. The woman's tendency will be to seek to control her mate. The man's tendency will be to seek to destroy his wife (whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually). And thus, marriage in this age will be characterized by warfare, struggle, and conflict. This is all a result of sin.

And yet, Christ has come with healing in his wings.

When we turn to Ephesians 5:22-33 and read of God's plan for marriage, we notice a huge difference. Far from the woman trying to “control” her husband, Ephesians 5:22-24 says that the woman should “submit” to her husband. Far from the man trying to “destroy” his wife, Ephesians 5:25-33 says that the man should “love” his wife. Because of the salvation that Christ brings, the marriage relationship has been restored such that all in Christ can experience the blessings and benefits of a prefall relationship.

From this perspective, Ephesians 5:15-6:4 is a description of the family as God intended it to be. This is a picture of the prefall family. It is the family whose participants have been redeemed by the cross of Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> תְּשׁוּקָה t@shuwqah

<sup>5</sup> N.B. This rightly should be the “desire” of every man Song of Solomon 7:10

<sup>6</sup> מַשָּׁל mashal

<sup>7</sup> Compare Isaiah 19:4, and Judges 14:4; 15:11 Now generally the word does not demand this interpretation. It simply can denote oversight, rule, or government. Yet, in the context of sin and the curse of Genesis 3, we are on safe ground taking the term as despotism.

If your marriage is going to reflect the glory and blessing of a prefall marriage and enjoy the beauty of the marriage relationship as God intended it to be. If your marriage is to be characterized by Paul's words in this text then you must be saved. You must start living by faith. You must live by grace!

In view of this, I urge us all to examine ourselves. Let's ask ourselves a few questions.

1. Are you relying upon the work of Christ on the cross to save you — or are you living in your own strength?
2. Does your life reflect the redemption that Christ died to secure?
3. Do you struggle against sin, or are you at ease with your sinfulness.
4. Do you have a personal relationship with Christ?

The child of God is one who has a personal relationship with Christ. If you have yet to come to Christ, go to Him this day and ask for His forgiveness. Commit your way to the Lord. Salvation is the first prerequisite in God's plan for marriage.

## **A Spirit Filled Life**

Yet, Ephesians 5:15-21 contains another prerequisite to a Biblical marriage.

Ephesians 5:15, “**See then that ye walk circumspectly**, not as fools, but as wise.”

Now, Paul modifies this command with three exhortations: we are to be wise<sup>8</sup>, we are to be good stewards of our time<sup>9</sup>, and we are to understand God's will<sup>10</sup>

Now, because it is the marriage relationship that Paul uses as an example of this last exhortation, we discover a second prerequisite to a Biblical marriage in verses 17-21.

Ephesians 3:17, “Wherefore be ye not unwise, **but understanding what the will of the Lord is.**”

And what is that will?

Ephesians 3:18, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”

In the city of Ephesus, the primary deity was a god known as Bacchus — the god of wine. The worship of this deity occurred when the individual entered into a state of ecstasy. Thus, through the use of wild dancing, repetitive music, orgies, drugs, and especially drinking. The individual progressively elevated himself into communion with Bacchus through ecstatic “experience.”

Thus Paul, in contrast to the Bacchus cult, tells the believer that they are not seek to commune with God by being filled with wine. Rather, they are to be “Filled with the Spirit.” This leads to three activities. The Spirit filled individual will participate in a shared walking and praising of God.<sup>11</sup> The Spirit filled individual will give thanks.<sup>12</sup> The Spirit filled individual will submit one to another.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Compare Ephesians 3:15

<sup>9</sup> Compare Ephesians 3:16

<sup>10</sup> Compare Ephesians 3:17-21

<sup>11</sup> Compare Ephesians 3:19

<sup>12</sup> Compare Ephesians 3:20

<sup>13</sup> Compare Ephesians 3:21

The marriage relationship is an example of mutual submission. The second prerequisite to a Biblical marriage is a Spirit filled life

Much has been written about what Paul means by being Spirit filled. Some have taken this to be a charismatic experience. Sadly this interpretation leads to an “experience” not much different than that which Paul argues against when he denounces the practices of the Bacchus cult in verse 18. Others have taken this as a description of one who stoically tries to do what God wants us to do with the Spirit's blessing, but basically in their own power. And still others have understood this as simply being indwelt by the Spirit — as the Spirit indwells all Christians.

Well, what does it mean to be “Spirit Filled?” The answer is best explained by Scripture.

Colossians 3:16-17, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

Now notice a very important parallel between our passage in Ephesians (being “Spirit filled”) and the passage in Colossians (being “Word filled”). Both ideas issue forth the same response.

- A participation in a shared walking and praising of God. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16
- The giving of thanks. Ephesians 5:20 and Colossians 3:17

From this we conclude that to be “Spirit filled” is the same as being “Word filled.” It is being so under the control of the Word of God (which is the word of the Spirit) that what we do and say is as the Spirit would do and say. God's thoughts are our thoughts. God's will is our will. His plans are our plans. His work is our work.

And so, the lesson that we derive from this passage is this: If we are going to have a Biblical marriage, we must be Spirit filled. We must be a people who have submitted to the word of God such that the actions that spring from the deepest part of our being is nothing other than what God's word would have us do. We must be following the Spirit as He leads through God's Word.

And yet, sadly, this is where so many marriages fail. When the difficult times come in a marriage what is the first to go? Our personal walks with the Lord, Right?

There is a direct correlation between a Spirit filled life and a Biblical marriage. Show me a couple who love the Lord with all their heart, that individually strive to be controlled by the Spirit, and diligently labor at submitting all areas of their lives to the word of God and I will show you a great marriage — a Biblical marriage.

Yet sadly, so many miss this.

Rather than following the “prescription” that God gives for a Biblical marriage we neglect God's word and run to the latest book, counselor, seminar, or marriage retreat. One can read the latest and greatest book on marriage, and attend the best seminars, sit at the feet of the greatest therapists and still have a rotten marriage because their life is not Spirit filled. Your marriage will still be at war!

Let us each; individually cultivate a life that is Spirit filled. Let us be long in God's word. Let us

characteristically submit our whole lives to the word of God. Let us strive to be a people who daily commune with God in His word.

Don't Miss It: It is never too late to start. Whether you are single, married, divorced, struggling in a “bad” marriage, enjoying a “good” marriage let us seek the Lord and His strength.

## Mutual Submission

Ephesians 5:21-22, “Submitting<sup>14</sup> yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.”

As we have seen, verse 18 references the third way that the child of God “walks carefully” by being Spirit Filled. Now again, the phrase that modifies the concept of being Spirit filled, and serves as the spring-board for Paul's exhortation on Marriage in verses 22 -23 is verse 21. The whole of verses 22 -33 rests upon this one action: Mutual submission.

The word *subject* is a military term meaning to arrange or rank under. As such, it carries the idea of relinquishing one's rights. Now, contrary to what our society might think, this is not oppression or suppression rather it is the willing and loving ranking of ones needs, rights, and desires beneath another.

This action is to be taken in the fear of Christ. This provides the power and effectiveness of mutual submission. The only way a sinful being can rank themselves beneath another is when they have been redeemed by Christ, and thus “fear Him.”

John 13:1-5 describes the humility of Christ as He “ranked His rights” beneath the apostles and washed their feet. How is it that He did this?

John 13:3-5, “Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.”

As Christ ranked His wants, desires, and will beneath that of God and thus God's people, so likewise we are to mutually submit to God and each other. This is the third prerequisite for a Biblical marriage: mutual submission.

The woman's role in marriage is to submit to her husband by respecting his headship. The man's role in marriage is to submit to his wife by loving her (there is no greater act of submission than to die for someone, and that is the call of the husband.)<sup>15</sup> Verses 22-23 are all about mutual submission.

Sadly, this section continues to be one of the most misunderstood passages in all of Scripture. Modern women read it and see degradation. Ungodly men read it and see domination. But so few of us read it and see the beautiful product that mutual submission brings: A prefall marriage!

I am not saying that the man and the woman have no role distinction — that would violate the very text we are in. Rather, I am saying that each role is an expression of mutual submission.

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<sup>14</sup> וְשֵׂאֵתָם הִיּוֹטָסוֹ

<sup>15</sup> Compare Ephesians 5:25

All Biblical marriage must begin at this point. A Biblical marriage is not a 50/50 proposition. Neither is it a 100/100 proposition. Rather a Biblical marriage is a 100/0 proposition. I must give all and expect nothing in return. It must submit.

## **Task of Marital Counseling**

The answer may surprise you, but do you know one of the most difficult things about marriage counseling? It is trying to convince each individual that they — not their partner — is the one who needs to change. A struggling marriage is one in which neither individual is fulfilling their call. Both individuals are looking for the other to change. It is a marriage in which mutual submission is absent.

When Paul answered questions about the issues of marriage he said this:

1 Corinthians 7:3, “Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.”

God's plan for marriage is that both partners are to submit to each other by fulfilling each other's needs! And thus if we could only get the attitude of less of me and more of my spouse, not my needs, but my spouse's, not my will, but God's will our marriages would reflect the prefall relationship of Adam and Eve!

## **Jim and Barb**

Several years ago Jim and Barb came to me struggling in their marriage. As we began discussing the issues week after week, it became very apparent that BOTH wanted a better marriage, yet both were unwilling to do it God's way.

God's way presupposes salvation, a Spirit filled life, and mutual submission. Yet, in their hurry to get to Ephesians 5:22-23, they skipped over Ephesians 5:15-21 thus differing little from the treacherous men of 2 Timothy 3:5.

2 Timothy 3:5, “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”

Today Jim and Barb still struggle greatly- yet sadly, their greatest struggle is with hypocrites. They want a great marriage as described in God's word. Yet, they want it on their terms and not God's.

Listen, if we are going to enjoy the marriage God intends for His people, we must not ignore God's plan for marriage.

One cannot simply desire the benefit of Ephesians 5:22-33 at the neglect of Ephesians 5:15-21. To do so is to play the hypocrite and deny God's power.

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on October 12, 2003. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.