

Ephesians 5:28-33

Introduction

- ✓ Ephesians 5:23-25, 28-29 — The husband is the head of the wife *as also* Christ is the head of the Church... *As* the Church submits to Christ, *so also* wives [should submit] to [their] husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives *as also* Christ loved the church... *Just so* ought husbands to love their own wives... *just as* also Christ [does] the Church.

It's pretty obvious that Paul has been setting up a parallel or a comparison between Christ's relationship with the church and the husband's relationship with his wife. But is that *all* it is? Are we making too much out of something that's only intended as a comparison? This whole thing with Christ and the church – is it just an inspiring illustration? Or is it more than that? Is there some deeper, stronger connection between Christ's relationship with the Church and a husband's relationship with his wife? Last week, we ended with verses 28-30. This week, these are the verses we'll start with.

I. “Just so ought husbands to love their own wives as their own bodies. The one who loves his own wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it.”

Up till now, Paul has been telling the husbands to love their wives as Christ has loved His *bride*, the Church. But now Paul tells the husbands to love their wives even as their own *bodies* – as their own *flesh*. When Paul talks about the wife as the husband's own body and flesh, he obviously has to be thinking of those famous verses in Genesis chapter two.

- ✓ Genesis 2:23–24 — Then the man said, “This at last is *bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*; she shall be called Woman, because she was *taken out of Man*.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become *one flesh*.

This is a *creation* truth – a *creation* reality. The woman was taken out of the man (God formed Eve from one of Adam's ribs). So when a man and a woman come “back” together in marriage, they in some way become “one flesh” again – even as they were quite literally “one flesh” before God took the woman out of the man. But what does that mean? What does it look like? What was Moses really talking about back in Genesis chapter two? How are a husband and a wife “one flesh”? Obviously, the wife doesn't go back to being one of her husband's ribs! And the sexual relationship, while a sign and seal of this one flesh reality, is not the reality itself.

In some way, a man and a woman become permanently and constantly “one flesh” in marriage. In some amazing way, two separate individuals truly and really and actually become “one.” On the one hand, that's just a *fact* because it's something that God does and says is true (Mat. 19:6). On the other hand, we'll see this is something a husband and wife have to work very hard at in order to live it out and experience it practically. But however you look at it, this whole “one flesh” thing seems kind of strange. Why should a wife be described as her husband's own body – her husband's own flesh? Unless she were to go back to being one of her husband's ribs! What was Moses really talking about in Genesis chapter two? What's really going on here?

“Just so ought husbands to love their own wives *as their own bodies*. The one who loves his own wife loves *himself*. For no one ever hated *his own flesh*, but nourishes and cherishes it...”

II. “just as also Christ [does] the Church, because we are members of His body.”

And so the plot thickens. Or maybe we should say the plot “deepens.” *Not only* is the church the *bride* of Christ, but it “just so happens” that the church is also His *body*. That’s been a huge theme in Ephesians ever since chapter one.

- ✓ Ephesians 1:22-23 (cf. 2:16; 3:6; 4:4; 5:23) — [God] subjected all things under [Christ’s] 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.
- ✓ Ephesians 4:11-12 — And [Christ] himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of *the body of Christ*.
- ✓ Ephesians 4:15-16 — *We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head—Christ—*from whom *the whole body*, being joined together and united together by every supporting connection, according to the working in measure of each single part, causes the *growth of the body* for the building up of itself in love.

So the church is *both* the *bride* of Christ and the *body* of Christ. How interesting is that? — Because in Genesis chapter two, Eve becomes not only Adam’s bride but also his body (one flesh with him). The plot deepens. Up until now, we might have thought of the analogies of the bride and the body separately. But now Paul seems to be bringing them together as one — as two sides of the same coin.

So now we ask: Which came *first*, Adam and Eve with their one flesh union, or the marriage between Christ and the Church which is His body? What do you think? Well, Adam and Eve are in Genesis one, but the incarnate, human Christ and His church aren’t until the New Testament. So it was Adam and Eve with their one flesh union that came first in the “history books.” But God stands outside of all the history books. And at the end of the day, Adam and Eve becoming “one flesh” just can’t make complete sense all on its own. There’s no possible way. What’s the point? What’s it really all about? Even Moses must have wondered this as he wrote down the words. At the end of the day, Adam and Eve becoming one flesh in marriage just can’t make complete sense apart from an understanding of the *church* which is both the *bride* and the *body* of Christ. And so we conclude that there must be some sense in which the relationship between Christ and the church actually comes *before* Adam and Eve. There must be some sense in which the relationship between Christ and the church was not just the pattern for human marriage, but even the very *reason* that God gave us marriage in the first place. And so Paul goes on now to quote Genesis chapter two:

III. “Because of this a man will leave father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”

Maybe you see it already? This whole thing is almost a word for word quotation of the Greek translation of Genesis 2:24. *Almost* word for word. Paul says “father and mother” instead of “*his* father and *his* mother.” There’s no significance there. But Paul also uses a different Greek word to say “because” (“*Because* of this a man will leave father and mother...”). Both words mean the same thing (“*because*”), but could there be some reason, some significance as to why Paul changed it up?

In Genesis, the words “*because of this*” point us back to the **creation** truth or the **creation** reality that the woman was taken out of the man.

“***Because of this [because woman was taken out of man]*** a man will leave father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become ***one flesh.***”

In Genesis, the only explanation for the idea of “one flesh” in marriage is the creation reality that the woman was taken out of the man (from one of his ribs). This was all Moses knew because it was all that God had revealed. But that couldn’t be all. The creation reality couldn’t explain everything. It left the “one flesh” idea still very “strange” and very mysterious. And it remained that way until many, many centuries later, when the Apostle Paul quoted Genesis 2:24 and lifted it into a whole new world – at least new *to all of us humans*. Now the words “*because of this*” point us back not to the creation reality that the woman was taken out of the man (from one of his ribs), but to the **redemptive, saving** truth that as the bride of Christ, the church is Christ’s own body. Is this maybe why Paul used a different word for “because”? (cf. Thielman) Was he signaling to us the *fulfillment* of Genesis 2:24? Was he signaling to us that the opening words of Genesis 2:24 (“because of this”) were intended all along to point us back not only to creation (woman was taken out of man), but also to God’s salvation plan? Now that Christ has come in the “history books” and redeemed a bride for Himself to be His body – now we can go back to Genesis 2:24 and read it with all the lights turned on. “Just so,” Paul says, “ought husbands to love their own wives *as their own bodies*. The one who loves his own wife loves *himself*. For no one ever hated *his own flesh*, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as also Christ [does] the Church, because ***WE ARE MEMBERS OF HIS BODY.***” And now what does Paul do? He quotes Genesis 2:24 – now in light of its *fulfillment*.

“***Because of this [because the church is Christ’s body]*** a man will leave father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become ***ONE FLESH.***”

So which came first, Adam and Eve with their one flesh union, or the marriage between Christ and the Church which is His body? In the history books it was Adam and Eve with their one flesh union that came first. But in God’s eternal purpose, it was the marriage between Christ and the Church which is His body that came first. That’s what Paul is saying. ***Because*** it was God’s plan from before the foundation of the world to send His Son into the world to redeem a bride for Himself—a bride that would actually be His body, ***therefore*** (“*because of this*”) “a man will leave father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become ***ONE FLESH.***” ***Therefore***—“*because of this*”—God gave us marriage. So we see that the relationship between Christ and His church isn’t just an inspiring illustration, or even just the pattern for human marriage – it’s the **reason** for human marriage. So Paul continues:

IV. “This mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and with reference to the church.”

In the Bible, a mystery isn't something like we think of in a mystery book – something that with enough clues we can figure out on our own. In the Bible, a mystery is something that was at one time “hidden in God,” but now God has *revealed* it and made it known to us. In the Bible, there's really only one mystery, but with many different parts and facets. And this mystery is the previously unrevealed truth about Jesus Christ and God's purpose to unite all things in Him – things in heaven and things on earth, in Him.

- ✓ Ephesians 1:9-10 — Having *made known* to us the **MYSTERY** of His will... to *unite all things in Christ*, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him.
- ✓ Ephesians 3:3-6 — The **MYSTERY** was *made known* to me by revelation... whereby when you read this, you can perceive my insight into the **MYSTERY** of Christ, which was not *made known* to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been *revealed* to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit – *that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*
- ✓ Ephesians 3:8-11 — To me, the very least of all the saints, this grace was given... to bring to light for everyone what is the administration of the **MYSTERY hidden** for ages in God who created all things, so that *through the church* the manifold wisdom of God might now be *made known* to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

And now Paul says that here, in Genesis 2:24 is a great mystery. In other words, something that was previously hidden deep within the infinite depths of God (a “*great*” mystery) has now been fully revealed and made known to us! And what is the mystery? It's not that in marriage a husband and wife become one flesh. That can't be the mystery, because it was already revealed in the very beginning. The mystery is that Christ has redeemed a *bride* for Himself and now as His *bride* we are even members of his *body*. And it's *this mystery*, Paul says, that Genesis 2:24 is really speaking of. “This mystery is great,” Paul says, “but I am speaking with reference to Christ and with reference to the church.” It was *because* of this mystery that God created marriage. It was *because* He desired to *reveal* this wonderful mystery to us and help us to understand its meaning that God spoke these words in Genesis 2:24 – “and the two will become *one flesh*.”

God created marriage in order “to reveal the mystery of Christ loving his responsive church.” [Such a marriage] reproduces in miniature the beauty shared between the Bridegroom and the Bride. And through it all, the mystery of the gospel is unveiled.” (O'Brien; quoting Ortlund)

Indeed, in the *one flesh* union of marriage we also see a picture of the ultimate *uniting* of all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him (cf. Lincoln and O'Brien).

Moses could never know the true significance of “one-flesh.” He spoke about it, and even experienced it as a husband, but he couldn't fully understand it. Moses couldn't fully know the true reason and meaning and purpose for marriage. But now the mystery, previously hidden deep within the infinite depths of God has been revealed. Now the reason God gave us marriage has been fully unveiled in Christ.

“BECAUSE [we are members of Christ’s body, THEREFORE,] a man will leave father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become *one flesh*.”

This is *why*, in the very beginning, God invented marriage: *Because* of, and in order to *explain* and *reveal*, the amazing mystery that we are the bride of Christ, and members of His body. So Paul concludes:

V. “Now then you also—each and every single one—must love his own wife in this way – as himself, and let the wife see that she fears her husband.”

Very suddenly, Paul comes back “down to earth” – to our everyday, practical living. But that everyday, practical living has a heavenly beauty and urgency to it now that maybe we didn’t see before. *This is how* a husband and wife live out and experience that reality of the one flesh union. It’s by the husband, as the “head,” loving his wife and laying down his life for her in all things, so that she might be always more and more his own glory and joy. And it’s by the wife “fearing” and “submitting” to her head (deferring to her husband as the one for whom she was created) in all things. *That’s how* the one flesh union is *experienced* and *lived out*.

But what’s at stake here is not just our own experience. What’s really at stake is the unveiling of the **Gospel**. What’s really at stake is the *revealing* to us and to others of the previously unrevealed mystery that we are the bride of Christ and members of His body. It’s because the stakes are so very high that Paul concludes with so much fervor: “Now then you also—each and every single one—must love his own wife in this way – as himself, and let the wife see that she fears her husband.” Failure here is to veil and to hide the Gospel of Christ, and to rob God of His glory.

Is your marriage revealing and unveiling and displaying the mystery that we are the bride of Christ and members of His body? Most importantly, are you doing your **part** (no matter what your wife or husband may be doing) to reveal, and unveil, and display the Gospel in your marriage? You can, and you get to, by God’s amazing grace. Husbands, are you taking the time to truly listen to your wife so you can better understand how to love her and lay down your life for her – making every provision for her physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually? (Remember, we don’t have the benefit of sharing in Christ’s infinite knowledge and wisdom.) Husbands, are you rejoicing over your wife – is she your glory and joy? Wives, are you truly submitting to your husband in everything—with a meek and peaceable spirit, and with holy fear—as the one whom God Himself has sovereignly appointed as your authority and head?

Once again we see even more clearly than before that marriage has an end beyond itself – because it has a *reason* far bigger than itself. That’s what enables an unloved wife to submit to her husband in everything (“in the fear of Christ,” and “as to the Lord”). And that’s what enables a husband whose headship is rejected to love his wife and lay down his life for her. This is also what enables the unmarried person to find true fulfillment outside of marriage. Because marriage is not the “end all.” Far, far, far from it! Paul wasn’t married, but he didn’t feel gypped in his understanding and experience of the mystery. The unmarried Paul didn’t feel like he was less able to rejoice in the reason God gave us marriage. And so this is what we should know: The point isn’t whether God has assigned you an *acting* role as a husband or a wife or whether he’s

given you a front row seat to watch godly marriages lived out around you. The *point* is that marriage reveals to all of us, and helps all of us to understand the mystery that we are the Bride of Christ and members of His body – that He loved us and laid down His life for us, and that He loves us still and daily nourishes and cherishes us and rejoices over us as in holy fear we gladly submit ourselves to Him in everything.