

## A Spirit-Filled Family, part 1 Ephesians 5:22-33

Let's face it: so many homes are filled with heartache. In 2019 in this country there were more than 2 million marriage ceremonies. But there were more than 746,000 divorces. These sterile statistics don't begin to convey the hours of pain and grief that taunt the American public. Our church members minister to a number of children whose families have been ripped apart with evil. The news of the agony of yet another failed marriage has affected every one of us here today. What is the answer for this agonizing situation?

In the [message](#) last Sunday from Ephesians 5:18-21, we considered what it means for the believer to be filled by the Spirit of God. Astounding as it may seem, the united members of a local church understand that they can be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19-21)! In a day when the popular entertainment centers on super heroes with special powers, this prayer of Paul is all the more astounding. Remarkable abilities that help believers to reconcile men to Christ are not a fanciful wonder; they are the work of God's Spirit. In the message on "[The Liberty of the Spirit](#)"<sup>i</sup> we learned that believers who are filled by God's Spirit become joyful, thankful and humble. In Ephesians 5:22-33, we will see how this filling of the Spirit overflows into family living. Just think of what family living would be like if that family included joyful, thankful, humble people: a Spirit-filled family.

### The Holy Spirit, Like a Dove

In the Scriptures, there are three prominent illustrations of the Holy Spirit. He is like a dove; He is like the wind (John 3:8, Acts 2:2-4); He is like oil (especially in anointing, 1 Samuel 16:13, Isaiah 61:1, Acts 10:38). For our message today, it will be helpful to consider the Holy Spirit as being like a dove. John the Baptist (the cousin of Jesus) testified about this, and it is recorded in Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10 and John 1:32. **"And John bore record, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.'"** (John 1:32).

Why did the Holy Spirit choose to be identified with the dove? There are a few different English words that refer to a flock of doves, but one of the most well-known is a "dole" – in the expression, "a dole of doves."<sup>ii</sup> This word "dole" (pronounced "dool") comes from the French word [doel] meaning "to mourn or grieve." This is because of the dove's distinctive bird call. Our English word "doleful" comes from the same French word. Because of its mournful cry, even here in our country we refer to it as "a mourning dove." In Isaiah 38:14; 59:11, and Ezekiel 7:16, the Holy Spirit gave us the words, "mourning like a dove." So in Romans 8 we find the Holy Spirit mourning and groaning with believers who live in a cursed creation (Romans 8:19-27). The next time you hear the pitiful coo of the mourning dove, think about the Holy Spirit mourning over creation.

The dove also symbolizes rest and peace in the Scriptures. Remember that, of all the creatures in God's kingdom, Noah sent the dove out from the ark (Genesis 8:8-12). After the Flood, Noah wanted to find out how far the waters had receded. He sent the tender dove to survey the devastation of the world, to find out when it would be suitable for the animals. The dove returned with an olive branch (Genesis 8:11) which has become an enduring symbol of peace to this day. In Psalm 55:6, David used the illustration of the dove longing for peace: **"Oh that I had the wings of a dove, then would I fly away and**

**be at rest.”** Song of Solomon 2:12 refers to the voice of the turtle dove in the spring after the winter is past. So the Holy Spirit is associated with peace (Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 4:3).

The dove is associated with harmlessness. Doves feed on seeds and fruits, but a few species also eat snails and insects. The dove is not a predator. This is why Jesus told His disciples, **“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves”** (Matthew 10:16). The Holy Spirit is not like the Great-tailed Grackle that you will see here in our area.<sup>iii</sup> The Grackle is a predator bird that eats other birds. But the dove, like the Holy Spirit, is associated with harmlessness. But though it is harmless, the wise dove understands the seasons (Jeremiah 8:7).

The dove is associated with purity and love. Solomon pictured his beloved as a flawless dove (Song of Solomon 5:2; 6:9). The dove was considered to be a “clean” bird in the Old Testament sacrifices (Leviticus 12:6). The poor who wanted to honor God would often offer a single dove as a sacrifice; this is one of the reasons that Jesus grew so angry with the religious thieves who tried to cheat the poorest people by charging too much for doves (Matthew 21:12). When you think of the Holy Spirit being like a dove, enabling joyful, thankful, humble people, you see a delightful picture of how God wants families to join together in harmless, pure, peace and love. Yes, there will be mourning and grieving over sin and its consequences, but the Spirit leads us to joy and peace.

In this message, and the next message, we want to consider how Spirit-Filled families are supposed to work. In every one of us there is a longing for this. We all feel this innate sense of “the way things ought to be.” Yet we wrestle with this life on earth under the curse of sin, mourning like a dove. But bear in mind that we can remember God’s sanctifying grace as godly responses activated by Christ’s enablement. The Holy Spirit can lead each member of the home to be part of a Spirit-filled family.

### **Marriage as a Picture of Christ and His Church**

**“<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. <sup>24</sup> Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything. <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; <sup>26</sup> That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup> That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church: <sup>30</sup> For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. <sup>31</sup> For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. <sup>32</sup> This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband.”**

The most prominent theme in this passage on marriage is this: marriages are designed to paint a picture of Jesus Christ and His church. God designed marriage; it was not an afterthought to somehow make intimacy legitimate. God designed the family to magnify His unique excellence. In this passage, it is evident that every married person has the opportunity to portray the beautiful relationship of Jesus Christ, the bridegroom, with His bride, the church. I believe that this is a part of the Lord’s larger design for His image-bearers, humanity. Where do you find this: three equal Persons, living in harmony, yet the

second is submissive to the first, and the third submits the first and the second? Of course, this describes the Trinity: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit –equally God, yet living and working in harmony. The Son submits to the Father and the Holy Spirit submits to the Father and the Son. But this arrangement also portrays God’s design for the family. The husband is portrayed as the leader who demonstrates marital submission by his mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21). The wife submits to her husband and the children submit to both mom and dad.

Today and next Sunday, we will explore the following scenes in the Spirit-filled family.

1. By the enablement of God’s Spirit, each wife can submit herself to her own husband. 22, 24
2. By the enablement of God’s Spirit, each husband can love his wife. 25-32
3. By the enablement of God’s Spirit, each married couple can paint a picture of Jesus Christ and His Church. 23-33

For today’s message, let’s look closely at the theology behind this thought-provoking passage.

- A. **Christ is the head of the church and He is the Savior of the body, v. 23.**
- B. **Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, v. 25.**
- C. **Christ sets the church apart, cleansing it with the washing of the Word of God, v.26.**
- D. **Christ will present the church to Himself (at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb)<sup>iv</sup> as His pure and holy bride, v.27.**
- E. **Christ is the Lord of the church, v. 29. True Christians are members of the body of Christ, v.30.**
- F. **A marriage – any marriage – finds its deepest meaning in the mystery of Christ and His church, v. 32.**

When Jesus Christ came to earth, He taught, **“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45). Our Lord was the ultimate Servant-Leader. He set the pattern for all leaders. Leaders are to serve those whom they lead. He is the head of the body (the church) and He became so by becoming the Savior of the body. Samuel John Stone wrote, *“The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord; She is His new creation by water and the Word: From heav’n He came and sought her to be His holy Bride; With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.”<sup>v</sup>* The witness of Christ, given to us by the Holy Spirit, testify that Christ is the Savior of the body.

Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. John’s beautiful doxology in Revelation chapter 1 includes the words, **“Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood ...”** (Revelation 1:5). How far did Jesus take this idea of serving others? He took it all the way to the cross. He wrestled sin to the death and defeated death. For though Jesus Christ died for the rebellious sins of mankind, He came forth alive from the dead three days later (1 Corinthians 15:1-6). Jesus is the Savior of the body – the church – because He won her liberty and paid her ransom with His own blood. Even when we all wrestle with the curse of sin and its impact on our families, we should look unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Every husband should look to the model Husband, Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom. Have you known the cleansing power of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the body? Near the end of the Bible, we find that the appeal is the same: **“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him who hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely”** (Revelation 22:17).

Verse 26 notes the continuing ministry of Christ to His church. He washes His bride with the Word of God. Not only did Jesus give us His body on the cross, He also gave us our Bibles. During His earthly ministry, He showed us how to use the Bible the right way. God has spoken in many ways at many times in the past. But Hebrews 1:1 is emphatic: in these last days He has spoken by His Son, whom He has appointed as heir of all things, by whom He created the world. Have you bathed your soul in your Bible? Do you know the continual cleansing power of the Word of God? The word of the Holy Spirit can fill the family with new meaning.

Every bride knows what it is to joyously contemplate her wedding day. Even fathers and grandfathers get caught up in the excitement of seeing the bride come down the aisle. So with eagerness and great joy, true Christians can look forward to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb: **“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. <sup>9</sup> And he said unto me, Write, Blessed *are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said unto me, These are the true sayings of God.”** (Revelation 19:7-9)

Ephesians 5:31 refers to the husband and wife as one flesh. This phrase amplifies the great mystery of the church. Verse 30 tells us that we are members of the body of Christ. True Christians are members of the body with Jesus Christ, the Lord, as the Head of the church.

Those who are in a marriage – any marriage – will find that their marriage is missing something if they do not grasp this essential point: marriage is a picture of Jesus Christ and His Church. The Holy Spirit of God fills the family with deeper meaning – a meaning that points to eternity. This is the joy of being a Spirit-filled family.

Yes, society is filled with the pain of families who are torn apart by sin and its consequences. But today we have learned that there is a better way. By the enablement of the Holy Spirit, we can live in Spirit-filled families.

*Pastor Gordon Dickson, Calvary Baptist Church, Findlay, Ohio [www.cbcbfindlay.org](http://www.cbcbfindlay.org)*

---

<sup>i</sup> The Liberty of the Spirit, a message from Ephesians 5:17-21 accessed at <https://www.cbcbfindlay.org/the-liberty-of-the-spirit/>

<sup>ii</sup> See “What is a Group of Doves Called?” citing the U.S. Geological Survey, accessed at <https://www.reference.com/pets-animals/group-doves-called-dd823cd212a32e0f> A group of turtle doves is known as “a pitying.”

<sup>iii</sup> Great-tailed Grackle, Field Guide to Birds of North America, accessed at [https://identify.whatbird.com/obi/537/overview/great-tailed\\_grackle.aspx](https://identify.whatbird.com/obi/537/overview/great-tailed_grackle.aspx)

<sup>iv</sup> Revelation 19:9

<sup>v</sup> Stone and Wesley, The Church’s One Foundation, accessed at <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/833>