



A Heavenly Mystery

Closing out what we know as [Ephesians 5](#), the Apostle Paul is in the midst of instructing believers on how to behave among other Christians, and he starts with the top of the family: husbands and wives. In the previous verses we saw how he reaffirmed the family headship and structure, relating it to how Christ is head of the Church and loves, protects, and nourishes her, just like a good husband must do for his wife.

Now, Paul connects an even more amazing detail about the marriage union being a representation of Christ's relationship with His bride, the Church:

FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.
[Eph 5:31-33](#)

Paul begins by directly quoting from [Genesis 2:24](#) where God said, ***“a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife.”*** The Greek words used in this sentence are quite intense. “Leave” is [katalēipō](#) which means to *forsake, depart from, or abandon*. And “be joined” is from [proskollāō](#), meaning to *glue upon, stick to, or join oneself closely*.

At first I wondered why it was in this order; the husband leaving his parents to join his wife. Was this simply helpful advice for newlyweds to get a healthy start on their own? Then I realized this is much deeper. It is a truly picture of what Christ did for us. He, being as a husband, *left* His Father in heaven and came to earth to *join* Himself to us, His bride.

Let that truth sink in and consider the significance of what it must have been like for the Son to leave the Father and then to suffer such horrific atrocities... all this out of love for His bride. Is that not an absolutely beautiful illustration? I am immediately reminded of [Philippians 2:5-8](#). This is true agape love!

As a side note, it's worth considering that there also seems to be prophetic inferences here as we look ahead to Christ's coming down from heaven again to rule and reign for a thousand years on earth ([Rev 20:4](#), etc).

Paul then says, ***“this mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”*** Paul often used the word ‘mystery’ in his epistles, even here in Ephesians when he talked about how the mystery of Christ is that His death and resurrection also brought salvation to the Gentiles, something that had not been clearly revealed before ([Eph 1:9-10 3:6](#)). The



Greek word for mystery ([mystērion](#)) is often translated *hidden* or *secret*, so it's to be understood as 'not divulged plainly' to just anyone. Think of it as privileged information. And such is the case here. It is difficult to understand from an earthly perspective how, in the bonds of marriage, a husband and wife become *one flesh*, but thankfully Paul immediately explains this statement: ***"but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church."***

When a virgin couple marry and come together the first time, blood is shed, and going way back to the early days of Jewish tradition, this blood was the evidence and seal of the covenant between a husband and wife. This is one reason a woman's virginity was so sacred among the Israelites; the pure bond of blood between a virgin bride and her husband was a binding, lifelong contract. In a similar thread, Paul is saying that when Christ shed His sinless (virgin) blood, that blood sealed the holy covenant between Him and His Church. In that blood we become one in Spirit with Him ([Matt 26:27-28](#), [Eph 4:4-6](#)). And hence we are called the bride of Christ ([2 Cor. 11:2](#), [Rev 19:7](#), [Rev 21:9](#)).

We can now see more into this great mystery that existed since the creation of the first man and woman, and in what way marriage is a sacred foreshadow of how we too are Christ's bride in His coming kingdom. What a blessed promise!

Paul closes out this paragraph and chapter 5 by circling back to the start of his talk to married couples: ***"Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband."*** Just as Christ deeply loves the Church, so must a husband love, care for, and cherish his wife. And in turn, a wife should honor and respect her loving husband. In doing so, both offer true worship to God through this physical manifestation of a heavenly relationship. A relationship sealed in blood, and a mystery revealed to us by God's Spirit through His holy and precious Word.

~Associate Pastor Jeremy Preece