

Marriage: Designed for Oneness

Intro. Mom's, we appreciate you...not just today, but everyday! That video reminds me of how so many mothers have faithfully stood by their children at each stage of their lives. The loving care they lavished on us helps us understand and believe in God's love for us. John Wesley said, *"I learned more about Christianity from my mother than from all the theologians of England."*

Years ago, when Betty Brenner was the religious editor for the Flint Journal, she phoned the church office to ask a question. She said, *"Pastor Dean, you've been preaching for a long time. Is it hard to come up with new sermons for Mother's Day? I mean, the Bible has only so many passages that deal with mother-hood and how many times can you bludgeon the ladies with the example of the ideal woman in Prov. 31?"* She then asked, *"Do local pastors get together to compare notes?"* I said, *"No we don't do that, but you've given me a great idea!"*

Betty's question was right on point. It can be stressful to find a new slant for a Mother's Day message. (I'm not suggesting you give me flowers or anything!) But something I've come to realize more and more is that God wants to bless His people. Though He showers us with blessings we often take for granted, His special blessing is reserved for those who embrace His Word. Jesus is the Incarnate Word. The first and last words He spoke were blessings! John wrote this comment - **From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another. (Jn. 1:16)** So instead of hunting for a verse that has "mother" in it, I want to continue our study of **Eph. 5** this AM. Do you know why that just might work on Mother's Day?...Because **5:22-33** declare God's path of blessing for married people. Now I realize some women aren't mothers and other women have lost their marriage partner, but God's word has instruction and blessing for all of us...especially passages that deal with relationships. You may have to chew on this thought awhile, but we are never more truly human than when we see ourselves as God created us to be. Since God's ways are right and best, our lives and relationships are enriched and made more satisfying the closer we come to His design. By returning to His plan, perhaps we can bless and honor the mothers in our midst. So let's see what God has said to add happiness, fulfillment and blessing to our lives.

The last time we considered **Eph. 5** we compared **v.18** to first base / **v.21** to second base / and **v.22-33** to third base. Without preaching that entire message a second time, (although there may be grounds for doing that) let me simply remind you that Greek scholars recognize the textual apparatus involved in the clear progression of logic from **v.18** to **v.21** and from **v.21** to **v.22**. You don't have to know much about baseball to know a player must advance one base at a time. But the same is true in the logic of these verses. The command to **be filled with the Spirit** is the primary command. It's first base. Along with a singing heart and thankfulness for everything, the Spirit produces a willingness to submit to one another in the church. These three visible results are produced in a life where God's Spirit is given control. Singing and thankfulness are evident in a grace-centered life and willingness to submit to others is the crowning proof. So that's **v.19-21**. Submitting to others is a willingness to yield and

take a lower place. It proceeds from a disposition that esteems others better than self. It's being like Jesus. As Harold Hoener of Dallas Theological Seminary writes, "*Spirit controlled believers willingly serve others and place themselves under them rather than dominating them and exalting themselves over them.*" So if first base is being filled with God's Spirit, a grace-centered life and submissive attitude is second base. But then as we explained last time, third base is **v.22-33** where a wife is instructed to submit to her husband and a husband is instructed to love his wife.

Ever since the fall, men have wanted wives who submit to them and do for them. The trouble is...very few husbands want to be Spirit controlled most would rather not submit to anybody especially to a wife. This conflict is a direct consequence of the fall. When the Lord spoke to Eve after the first couple sinned, He said, **Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. (Gen. 3:6)**

This means women have a natural built in need and desire to have a husband...but the curse brought tension to the equation. The husband she desires will tend to rule over her in a selfish, unloving way. The curse brought a source of antagonism that rips marriages apart. The struggle for control is like a tug of war. Only Christ can defeat the power of the curse and return harmony to marriage. But given the instructions of **Eph. 5:22-33**, many husbands and wives want to jump to third base without touching first or second! A husband demands his wife submit to his leadership without the Spirit's control and wives insist her husband love the way Jesus does. Yet in many marriages, neither spouse is passionate to become the singing / thankful / submissive person the Spirit of God wants them to be. Neither is serious about becoming like Christ. So the effect of the curse rolls on and on and God's remedy goes unapplied.

It's important for us to understand the point of that earlier message wasn't to relieve women of their responsibility to submit to their husbands. Not at all! A wife should place herself under her husband's leadership. The point of the message was to keep the commands of **vs. 22-33** in context and to show how beautiful the marriage relationship can be when husband and wife are Spirit-filled and Christ-like. Yet so many marriages have been negatively affected by a patriarchal ideology that emphasizes **v.22** while allowing men to be selfish, dictatorial and abusive. This teaching ignores the rest of Scripture where the Lord puts such high value on humility, lowliness of mind, and the heart of a servant.

By the way, a godly woman wrote to me in response to that earlier message. In her letter she said she's counseled a number of Christian women who suffer under the crushing rule of a demanding husband ...men who treat their wives like a possession instead of a partner. Seeking help, some of them turned to their pastor. But session after session ended with the pastor telling them... "*You just need to be more submissive!*" For a lady who is worn out from trying to please her husband and meet his demands, this counsel is like pouring salt into an open wound! A door mat can lie only so flat and low to the ground! Is that what God intends for married women? Is that really God's idea of a husband's headship? Is that what God expects of a wife when he asks her to submit to her husband? Are you sure about that? We need to go to the Bible to see if this teaching is true or false.

1. In the beginning was the end...

To sort this out we need to take a closer look at what the Scriptures say. Do you know what Jesus and the NT authors often did when questions arose about marriage the respective roles of men and women? They send us back to Genesis. They remind us of the creation account. Remember when the religious leaders questioned Jesus about divorce? **Matt.19:3-8 - Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.**

Jesus sent these religious men and their questions back to Genesis...back to the beginning, the time of Creation. He said, "**Haven't you read** (your Torah)?" The Lord wasn't experimenting at the time of Creation. He wasn't testing a proto-type to see if it worked. Unlike trial and error we use with a new recipe or idea, God got it right the first time! That doesn't mean Adam and Eve understood every detail of God's plan. The revelation of God's will was progressive. In mercy, the Lord overlooked centuries of ignorance before His will was fully revealed. For example, polygamy isn't condemned in the OT. But from our place in history we understand, it was never God's ideal. The OT says **He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD. (Prov. 18:22)** Notice the verse says, **a wife** (singular). We now know from history and additional revelation that having a wife is good, but having more than one is like having too much of a **good** thing!

Do you realize how much confusion we of the 21st century could avoid if we just believed God's way is best and that He established that way at the time of Creation? Just consider the issues answered by the Genesis account. **First** of all, God intended for marriage to be permanent and for life. **Second**, God created the two sexes and he intended the covenant of marriage be made between one male and one female. **Third**, marriage involves leaving father and mother to create a new unity described as **one flesh** involving total openness and intimacy. Jesus explained that divorce was a concession made because men's hearts proved to be hard and resistant to God's control. Look at **v.8** again - **But it was not this way from the beginning**. God's design for life and marriage are found in **Gen.1, 2**.

But the entrance of sin and self-will is **chap. 3**. It's not until Jesus came bringing the power of a new life that sin and the grip of sin's curse are defeated. Even though God helped the sincere OT believer live as he ought to live, the indwelling presence of God's Spirit wasn't available until Jesus ascended to heaven. That's why the command to be

filled with the Spirit precedes marriage instructions. We are powerless to do life and marriage apart from Christ's salvation and the filling of His Spirit!

Another example is found in Paul's response to some women's libbers in the church at Corinth. These believing women were throwing off the head coverings that were a well-understood cultural symbol signifying their submission to God and a husband. **I Cor. 11:7-9 - A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.** Like Jesus before him, Paul referred to the created order and design in Genesis. He wants us to know that God got it right from the start. In the beginning was the end. I think somebody ought to start a ministry called *Answers in Genesis!* But let's dig a little deeper.

2. In the Triune God, Oneness is defined

The Bible begins this way... **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)**

Speaking through Moses, God answered life's deepest questions in just 10 words. Genesis declares that God existed at the beginning of time and that God is both personal and social...a God who communicates and creates through spoken word. Working from nothing, Genesis then declares that God created everything, including human beings. It declares that male and female were made in God's image and likeness for the purpose of glorifying Him. It's important to note that Adam couldn't do that alone! He wasn't good alone. He couldn't glorify the social and compassionate sides of God's nature apart from Eve's companionship. So marriage was God's plan for a man and his wife to bring him glory by demonstrating His image and likeness. **Gen. 1:27 says, So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**

If we turn the equation around, we can we learn a great deal about ourselves and about marriage from the nature of the God we were created to glorify. Let me explain what I mean. **Gen. 2:24** declares the divine formula for marriage in these words...**For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.** The concept of **one flesh** or the oneness of a man and his wife is a mystery expressed by the Hebrew word, *echad*. *Echad* signifies a composite one or one having parts. Jesus amplified this meaning in **Matt. 19:6** when He said, **So they (husband and wife) are no longer two, but one.**

But the Bible has at least two other passages contain this idea of composite oneness. The first is the Shema of **Deut. 6:4** where Moses said, **Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.**

When declaring the nature of Israel's God, Moses said, **the Lord is One.** He used the same Hebrew word used in **Gen. 2:24**. He used *echad* which means *one having parts*. The perfect unity found in the God of Israel is explained by the doctrine of the Trinity...the fact that God eternally exists in three persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So here the relationship of a man and his wife is compared to the unity of the Triune God.

Another passage is the familiar analogy where Jesus is the shepherd and we are His sheep. Jesus said in **Jn. 10:30, "I and the Father are one."** Just as Jesus and God the Father are equal in power and glory, a man and his wife are equals in God's sight. Though Eve was created to be a helper to Adam, the word "helper" always refers to an ally at the side of another. It never refers to a slave or servant! But let me ask this...is there any hint of rivalry or competition between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? Is there ever an argument or tug of war between the members of the Godhead? No, of course not! Such things don't exist in the triune relationship. But unlike the harmony found in God, the relationship between a man and his wife is often a rocky proposition. So what does oneness mean when applied to the man and wife who want to glorify God? It means their relationship will glorify God by showing forth His image and likeness as they exhibit the oneness produced by the Holy Spirit.

Let me take this a step further as we consider how the divine oneness actually works. **Gen.1:26, 27** say, **Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..."** ...**So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them.** Notice the plural pronouns **us** and **our** in **v.26** and the singular pronouns, **His**, and **He** used twice in **v.27**. These verses add support to the doctrine of the Tri-unity of God...The Lord is one God who eternally exists in three persons, therefore both the pronouns **us** and **he** apply to Him..

But the fact that the Lord said, **Let us make man in our image, in our likeness**, suggests creation was a joint decision involving each member of the Trinity. The Lord didn't say, *Let Me make*, He said, **Let Us make**. The fact that each member of the Trinity was involved in creation is declared in other parts of the Bible. **Gen.1:1** speaks of the Father's involvement when it says, **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.** Then in **Gen. 1:2** we're told the Holy Spirit was also involved ...**the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.** Job spoke of the co-creative work of the Father and Spirit when he said, **The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life. (Job 33:4)** Then in the NT, **Jn. 1** introduces us to Jesus and says, **Through Him** (Jesus, the Incarnate Word) **all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.** The involvement of Christ in creation is echoed in **Col. 1:16** - where Paul wrote, **For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth...** So according to the Bible, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were involved in creation. The 3 persons who are the One God worked together as One team to get the work done. Then as you may recall, the Triune God visited Abraham. None of the three was too high to come down to man or too holy to touch the dust and basic elements of our fallen world!

Back in 2,000 Peggy and I built our house on Woodridge Dr. It was a joint effort in every way. We discussed everything. She said, *"I want this and this"* and I said, *"OK, great!"* But kidding aside, from the design phase to decorating, we worked together as a team. Peggy even climbed up on our steep roof to hand me shingles. But I have to confess,

there were some stressful moments...but let's not go there! It's Mother's Day! Like igneous rock our house is the product of heat, pressure, and the DNA of our collective ideas.

Yet in perfect unity and with no stress at all, the Triune God created the heavens and the earth. There were no debates / arguments / or power struggles in heaven! The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the ultimate design-build team! The same is true concerning salvation! The Father planned it / the Son gave His life to affect His Father's plan / and the Spirit brings new life to all who embrace the plan.

Yet what happened when Jesus submitted to His Father's plan? Did He become a doormat to be tread on again and again and again. No way! **Phil. 2:8, 9 - And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...**The Father responded to His Son's obedience by honoring Him. In the same way, a wife who submits to God and her husband will be honored. Today Father, Son, and Spirit continue to work together in perfect harmony. And just wait until you see the new heavens and earth they create!

But let's think a bit more about the relationships in the Trinity. In the case of God the Father and God the Son, the Bible says that each member magnifies or glorifies the others. Jesus voluntarily followed His Father's guidance and direction, even to the point of calling the Father "**His God.**" But the Father seeks to glorify the Son and proclaims Him "**God on his throne.**" (**Heb. 1:8**) All things are subjected to Jesus by the Father, but Jesus subjects himself to the Father only to find they are sharing the same throne anyway! This example of mutual respect and self-giving is awesome and beautiful...but we have to admit... not much of it is found in earthly relationships! It's part of the essence of God's holiness. The love and holiness of God result in a creative dynamism so that in the end, God is all and in all. Time won't allow us to explore this in greater detail, but the same oneness of heart and purpose exists between God the Son the Spirit who seeks to glorify Him.

So what can we take away from the oneness we see in our Creator and what impact does it offer our marriages? Like the oneness God intends for a man and his wife, each member of the Triune God communicates with the others...in fact, some divine conversations are recorded in the Bible! And won't you agree...communication is essential to a healthy marriage? In heaven, decisions are made jointly and those decisions are met with total cooperation. Joint decisions are a tangible way partners in marriage express mutual respect. The members of the Triune God are self-giving and they practice joyful submission one to another. Absent from the divine relationship is any sense of self-glory or independence. This essential nature of God is demonstrated in functional dynamism where each member exists in harmony with the others. In fact, each member exists to benefit and glorify the others! Do you see why we say oneness, as defined by God, is awesome and beautiful?

Having created us in His image and likeness, this is how God intends marriage to function. Even though the Bible says **the head of every man is Christ, and the head**

of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God (I Cor. 11:3)...the headship spoken of is never separated from the one-ness of equals and fully functioning partners. Nowhere is Biblical headship defined as boss-ship or ruler-ship! In fact, Jesus repudiated that kind of leadership in **Matt. 20** where He said the greatest in the kingdom is servant to all. Biblical headship is never dictatorial / selfish / rude / unloving / or inconsiderate. The emphasis of headship in the Bible isn't on a husband's rule, but on the vital connection between himself and his wife...just like his head is connected to rest of his body. The leadership a husband provides works the way the brain in his head protects his foot from stepping on broken glass. It's a headship that lovingly serves his wife the way his head cares for the rest of his body it's joined to.

The model for male headship is the respectful and loving service modeled by our Creator. Imagine the impact if the marriages in our church experienced the oneness found in God? Imagine how awesome it would be if husbands really talked with their wives and showed them respect by making every decision jointly? Imagine how beautiful it would be if husbands lived to benefit and glorify their wives and wives lived to assist and glorify their husbands? Isn't this what **Gal. 5:17** means when it instructs us to **serve one another in love**? From the divine model, don't you think a man ought to pitch in and help with the housework and childcare once in a while? Do you still think a husband has a right to be bossy, demanding, and inconsiderate of his mate? Do you still think a woman's place is to have babies and keep her opinions to herself?

3. In Jesus, love and submission are exemplified

But let's return to **Eph. 5:22-25** before we finish. **Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.**

To answer questions about marriage, Jesus and the NT authors appealed to Genesis and God's original design. Their appeals are based on the fact that God wasn't experimenting, but that He got it right the first time! Here in **Eph. 5** Paul appealed to a more recent example of God's creative activity ...Christ's newest creation. In **2:10** - Paul wrote, **For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus...** Here in **Eph. 5** the analogy for the marriage relationship is the relationship between Christ and His Church. The basis for comparison is four analogies:

First, notice in **v.22**, that a wife is to submit to her husband **as** or in the same way she submits to the Lord. Her willingness to submit to the Lord first, allows her to be filled with the Spirit.

Then in **v.23**, a husband's headship is compared to Christ who is the head of the church. **v.23 - For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.** Biblical headship emphasizes the vital connection between parties...a connection as vital as a human head is to the rest of the body. We can survive without certain limbs and organs, but no one can survive without

a head. And a head is sort of good for nothing when it's not connected to a body. Notice that we, the church, are **His body**...we are Christ's body. The loving care Christ extends to His body on earth is the way a man should respond to his wife. In the one flesh union, she is a vital extension of who he is. Paul expanded on this in **v.29** where he wrote, **After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--**

But notice that last clause in **v.23...of which He is the Savior**. Do you know what a wife wants her husband to be? She wants a man who cherishes her and rescues her. She wants him to be her hero who rescues her...not just physically, but emotionally, socially, intellectually, and spiritually. My stock went through the ceiling the day Peggy's car had a blow out and I just happened to be at the corner of Pierson and Linden to see it happen. Can you think of anything a husband would rather in the eyes of his wife than her hero? Some men wear Superman pajamas just hoping she'll catch on. Jesus means everything to us because He is our Savior! That's what a husband ought to be and do for his wife.

Then **v.24 - Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything**. This verse was sort of puzzling to me for a long time. I couldn't read it without remembering my own spiritual journey and the many Christians who do their own thing and disregard Christ's Lordship. We don't submit to Christ in everything. But here's what I've come to understand...whether we realize it or not, we are completely dependent on Jesus Christ. We couldn't save ourselves and we have no ability to keep ourselves saved. Apart from Christ we are without strength to live and serve. And how will we get to heaven if Jesus doesn't come to take us there? You see, just as Christ is our savior, the husband is to be a rescuer to his wife and she is to be a helper who honors him. We need each other. Is this co-dependency? You bet it is!

The clincher is **v.25 - Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her**. Here is the ultimate and most perfect example of the love relation that unites a man and His wife. Jesus, being fully the God who is love, gave himself for us...not because we were deserving...not because we had potential or so much to offer. Jesus gave His life because of who He is. And listen carefully to John who wrote...**As He is, so are we in this world**.

So as we consider the unity of our Triune Creator and study the relationship between Christ and His church, we find the examples we need to define the one flesh union of a man and his wife. It's nothing like the selfish, domineering power struggles that are so damaging to marriage. Instead we see that *the divine oneness is built on communication, mutual respect, joint decision-making, creative cooperation, and love...a relationship where each values, benefits, and actually glorifies the other*. May God help us to have marriages according to God's design, relationships that exhibit the image and likeness of our God. Far from being restrictive, God intends to enrich our lives and bless us by the instruction of His Word. He gave His Spirit to fill us with Himself. Let's not try to take third base until we've captured first and second!