

Sermon: The Ideal Marriage - It Takes Three!

Text: [Ephesians 5:21-33 ESV](#)

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Introduction: Mark Twain said, “There are two kinds of people in the world, and one always gets where they are going ten minutes early and the other always gets there ten minutes late. And they are always married to each other!”

It is impossible to have the ideal marriage unless you are a Christian. As you might imagine, having an ideal marriage is not always easy.

There are many expectations placed on those entering into marriage.

Let me share with you about what the Bible says.

A good marriage requires we obey God’s will and expectations. He requires:

I. Submission

Submission is about authority. Submission in marriage does not equate with being inferior. In fact in the Christian marriage, God says that submission is mutual.

[Ephesians 5:21-33](#) (The Message) ²¹ Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another. ²²⁻²⁴ Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing. So just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands. ²⁵⁻²⁸ Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ’s love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They’re really doing themselves a favor—since they’re already “one” in marriage. ²⁹⁻³³ No one abuses his own body, does he? No, he feeds and pampers it. That’s how Christ treats us, the church, since we are part of his body. And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become “one flesh.” This is a huge mystery, and I don’t pretend to understand it all. What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church. And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband.

A Christian marriage isn’t the marriage of just two Christians; a Christian marriage is one in which Jesus Christ is LORD and at its very center.

“If a man exercised authority in the way it is outlined in the Bible, a woman would not resent it. She would find herself served. She would find her needs met. She would have her say, be able to exercise her gifts, not be pushed back and ignored and treated like a second-class citizen. God’s design for marriage is for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and for wives to respect their husbands. Christ loved the church enough to die for it, and that kind of love is worthy of respect.” – Mike Singletary

Submission to authority is out of fashion today. But that is what God requires that we do – submit to each other and to Him. We submit in love because we are filled with His Spirit. God says that we are equal in our worth but different in our roles.

The wife is to submit herself to her husband. This is to preserve the order that God has ordained. The idea of the husband having authority over his wife is not one of tyranny or suppression, but one of responsible love under the direction of Christ himself. Headship expresses loving care rather than control, and responsibility rather than rule. A wife submits to her lover not some ogre.

Philippians 2:1-11 (MSG) 2: 1-4 If you’ve gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you *care*— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. 5-8 Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human!* Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion. 9-11 Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this (*the one and only*) Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.

Husbands – with leadership must come RESPONSIBILITY. You have a tremendous task ahead in order to demonstrate your love the way Christ did.

- CHRIST SHOWED US:**
- 1. Sacrificial Love (Cross)**
 - 2. Servant Love (Others’ needs first)**
 - 3. Covenant Love (No matter what)**

Christ in his leadership over the church does not crush her, but does everything to encourage/enhance her effectiveness. God's human family is designed to demonstrate his love and faithfulness to the Church. To put before our sick, out-of-control world:

- 1. New Standards**
- 2. New Expectations in Relationships**
- 3. New Goals for Personal Fulfillment**

The family becomes a visible, positive force.

A haven in a sometimes cold and unbelieving world.

Humility means two things. It means:

- 1. a capacity for self-criticism**
- 2. allowing others to shine, affirming others, empowering and enabling others.**

Those who lack humility are dogmatic (“my way or the highway” kind of attitude) and egotistical. That attitude usually masks a deep sense of insecurity. They feel the success of others is at the expense of their own fame and glory. (Cornel West, adapted)

Humility sees the best in others. You are the rock upon which I will build my church, Jesus told Peter. Peter wasn't really the rock then, in fact later, he would deny Christ, but Jesus saw his potential. A humble person will see his partner for what he or she can become with his/her help, but that takes:

II. Love

It was, and is, God who initiates love toward us through his sacrifice. He asks for love in return as it would be demonstrated by submission and respect. Really that is quite a human emotion isn't it? Don't we all want to be loved in return and respected?

Love includes the idea of faithfulness. Have you ever noticed that unfaithfulness or divorce in a marriage has far reaching effects?

Love also includes forgiveness. Consider the following true to life illustration from *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado: “I caught my husband making love to another woman. **(I always ask in counseling, what if...?) He swore it would never happen again. He begged me to forgive him but I could not – I would not. I was so bitter and so incapable of swallowing my pride that I could think of nothing but revenge. I was going to make him pay and pay dearly. I'd have my pound of flesh. **If you truly loved your spouse when they had a moral failure, why is it many want to hurt the offender?**”**

I filed for divorce, even though my children begged me not to. Even after the divorce, my husband tried for two years to win me back. I refused to have anything to do with him. He had struck first; now I was striking back. All I wanted was to make him pay.

Finally he gave up and married a lovely young widow with a couple of small children. He began rebuilding his life – without me.

I see them occasionally, and he looks so happy. They all do. And here I am – a lonely, old, miserable woman who allowed her selfish pride and foolish stubbornness to ruin her life.”

There is something worse than adultery. That may only show we are all too human. But when we fail to forgive, we lose an opportunity to show the world that we are made in the image of God and His Spirit lives within us.

“He who fails to forgive breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself!”

Love/Forgiveness - [I Corinthians 13:4](#) opens with “Love is patient, love is kind...” Later it says, “love keeps no record of wrongs”.

Another danger is to take people in any relationship, “for granted,” especially a spouse. [\(Explain my typical LePrino routine with work and family.\)](#)

***Craddock Stories*, pp. 27-28 - “We had a dinner guest in our home who was spending the night. As I read the paper, he played with our kids and taught them a new game. How long had it been since I had come home from work, got down on the floor, and played with the kids and taught them a new game? I was judged by that.**

Following dinner, he said to Mrs. Craddock, ‘I certainly appreciated the meal. That was just a wonderful meal.’ I tried to remember when it was that I had said that to my wife following dinner. I think it was in ‘49.

He went out for a walk and came back in and said, ‘Oh, those are nice folks next door. I met Mr. Yung and his wife from Seoul. Very nice young couple.’ Well, I had heard some Koreans moved in down there, but I didn’t know. When he said their first names, I was judged.

Just a familiar pattern: Come home, read the paper, and eat supper. Then here comes someone strange. Everything looks different, and I think, ‘Where in the world have I been?’”

The most effective tool in pursuit of the ideal marriage is:

III. The Holy Spirit

Illus. Charlie Steinmetz was a tiny dwarf of a man, but he had one of the keenest minds the field of electricity had known, especially in his time. He designed the generators for Henry Ford's first automobile plant in Dearborn, Michigan. The story is that one day those giant generators developed some problems and all of the staff people tried to fix it but they couldn't. Local electricians were called in and they couldn't fix it either. Finally they sent for Charlie Steinmetz. Steinmetz came and seemed to just putter around for a few hours. But when they threw the switches the giant engines came to life and Henry Ford was back in business.

Charlie Steinmetz sent Henry Ford a bill for \$10,000! Henry Ford sent the bill back with a note attached. "Charlie, don't you think this is a little steep for just a few hours of tinkering on those engines?" Steinmetz replied, "for a few hours tinkering on those engines, \$100.00. For knowing where to tinker, \$9,900! And Henry Ford paid the bill. I believe it is possible that the Holy Spirit may want to do some tinkering this morning. I hope you will let him because he knows just where to tinker!

Being able to submit to each other is made possible by the power and indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that helps us love and have within us the fruit of the Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit helps us speak to the Father, so it is with our spouses.

Conclusion: Again, may I repeat that a Christian marriage is one in which Jesus Christ is Lord! **Dale Moody's** story of the death of his mother and his father's response is one of the most beautiful I have ever heard. "She came down to breakfast one day and collapsed at the table. Her husband of more than 60 years swept up his bride and rushed out of the house. The neighbors said they knew something was bad because the elderly man was running like a deer. He put her in the pickup and sped out of the driveway and took her to the hospital where she was pronounced dead on arrival.

"He spoke about the funeral and how they all went back to the old home place and sat on the porch and talked. Mr. Moody asked his sons what their mother was doing right then - and they, both being preachers, tried to answer as best they could what happens to you when you die in the Lord.

"They talked and talked and it got (to be) quite late. Mr. Moody told his sons that he wanted to go back to the cemetery. They reminded him how late it was and said they would go first thing in the morning. He said he wanted to go then! And Dale Moody said that you don't say "no" to a man who has just buried his wife of more than 60 years.

“They went to the cemetery and Mr. Moody shined a flashlight up and down the grave for several moments then he stepped back and said, “It was a good 60 years and (it) ended just like I wanted it to end, she went first.” You see only if you love someone so much could you ever say anything like that. Dale Moody knew that his father meant that he was glad he was the one with the tears in his eyes and the pain in his heart over their parting. He was glad that she had been spared that, and that it was he that had to suffer! Mr. Moody then put his arms around his sons and said, “Boys, your mother was a Christian, we can go home now, it’s been a good day, its been a very good day.”

You see at the end of 60 years of living together in the fragile, delicate relationship of marriage each would have gladly given themselves for the other! I call that power! The kind of power that comes from the Holy Spirit. The kind of power that comes from submitting oneself to the Lordship of Jesus Christ!

It is extremely important not only to us, but also to the world, that we have ideal marriages. Without a “working” human model, God’s love is indeed difficult to communicate. The words: “I love you” grow meaningless without demonstrative proof (or at least evidence).

***A Dwelling Place for God* - (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Seeds of Hope*, pp. 72-73)**

Marriage is not a lifelong attraction of two individuals to each other, but a call for two people to witness together to God’s love. The basis of marriage is not mutual affection, or feelings, or emotions and passions that we associate with love, but a vocation, a being elected to build together a house for God in this world, to be like the two cherubs whose outstretched wings sheltered the Ark of the Covenant and created a space where Yahweh could be present (Ex. 25:10-12, 1 Kings 8:6-7).

Marriage is a relationship in which a man and a woman protect and nurture the inner sanctum within and between them and witness to that by the way in which they love each other. . . . Celibacy is part of marriage not simply because married couples may have to be able to live separated from each other for long periods of time, or because they may need to abstain from sexual relations for physical, mental, or spiritual reasons, but also because the intimacy of marriage itself is an intimacy that is based on the common participation in a love greater than the love two people can offer each other.

The real mystery of marriage is not that husband and wife love each other so much that they can find God in each other’s lives, but that God loves them so much that they can discover each other more and more as living reminders of God’s presence. They are brought together, indeed, as two prayerful hands extended toward God and forming in this way a home for God in this world. - *Clowning in Rome*

I Corinthians 13:3-8a ESV

3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8a Love never ends.