

Travel Guide: The Secret of Marriage

Bethany Assembly of God

8/13/2023

Central Proposition: You should preach the Gospel in your marriage.

Introduction

I enjoy listening to a podcast called Freakonomics Radio which addresses issues through an economic lens, and every once in a while there is an episode on marriage or love. It's always a little cold to listen to marriage discussed in economic terms, but it's still interesting. Recently, they replayed an episode entitled, "Why Did You Marry That Person," in which they explored the forces that move people to get married. We often reduce our decision to marry a person to one word, "Love." We believe that we made the decision to marry our spouse out of an enormous pool of possibilities because of love. The podcast episode explored the other, more concrete forces that are often at work. While we all love a good Cinderella story, it is far more likely that you will marry someone with a lot of similarities to you. For instance, people are far more likely to marry someone with a similar level of education and someone with a similar economic status to themselves or their family. Not to mention the limits placed on the pool of eligible spouses by your geography, religion, parents... This isn't to say that there aren't exceptions to the rules, but that there are a lot of forces at work in deciding on a spouse other than love and romance. And if you think you're getting a really wide pool by dating online, just consider that potential matches are now being shown to you based on an algorithm!

But that's really no surprise. Though a Pew Research Center survey reports that the number one reason people choose to get married is for love, it's obvious that we mean something different by love today than we did in the past. Hopefully we mean something different by love within the church than the culture at large does.

It seems like people have become increasingly transactional in their search for a partner or a spouse. It's true that we were always able to write down a list of characteristics we wanted in a spouse, but now, with online dating sites, you can pare down who you consider based on very specific desires including their appearance, their height, their income, their interests, their education... That's not all bad. We should have standards for who we marry. But, it would seem to add to the idea that you can find someone who fits you perfectly, that you'll find your "soulmate."

I hate to burst your bubble, but your "soulmate" doesn't exist. I don't believe in soulmates, at least not how "soulmate" is commonly defined. There isn't one other person who can perfectly fulfill you and complement you for eternity. And there certainly isn't anyone who is going to fulfill all your idealistic fantasies so that you don't have to change at all. Not only is the idea that there is just one person out there who could ever fulfill you irrational; I think it's unbiblical.

You see, there's a mystery to marriage. The Bible states this explicitly in Ephesians 5:32, **"This mystery is profound..."** Literally, the Greek says that the mystery is mega. Marriage is a mega mystery. But it doesn't mean that marriage is a mystery that can never be solved. The apostle Paul liked to use the word, "mystery" to describe something that could only be understood through the Gospel, the good news that God saved us by sending His Son Jesus to die for us, raising Him from the dead on the third day, and exalting Him to the highest position of authority, from which He will one day return to judge the earth and save His Church. And that's convenient for us since in our current series we're not looking for tips and tricks, but what the Gospel says about crucial issues in our lives.

Marriage is certainly a crucial issue. For many of us, it's crucial because we are married, or want to be married, or will one day be married. But even for those who are single and will remain single, marriage is crucial because it's good for society, but more importantly, because it's a profound revelation. Here's the mega mystery of marriage: it's a reflection of Christ and the Church. Let's read Ephesians 5:32, this time the whole verse, "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

We need to pause and think about how mega this mystery is. Paul did not say that marriage is a nice illustration or image of God's love. God did not create marriage and later decided that it would be a good way to illustrate His love for us. The opposite is true. Before He created us, God knew what He would do to save us. He knew that He would send His Son, who would willingly empty Himself of the privileges of heaven and become human. He knew that Jesus would die for our sin, obediently laying down His life for you and me. He knew that Christ's death would create a new kind of people made holy by faith in Him. And so, He created marriage to be a reflection of that kind of love.

This means that marriage is about Jesus more than it is about you. That will change your perspective about marriage, won't it? I'm not saying that you shouldn't have standards or be picky about some characteristics of a spouse, but ultimately, marriage isn't about your preferences or satisfaction, but about Jesus. That's not to say that marriage can't be satisfying, but rather that it's only or ultimate purpose is not to satisfy all your desires. Marriage should be joyful, it should make you happy, but that's not its ultimate goal. Its ultimate goal is to reveal something about Jesus. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." (Ephesians 5:31-32)

You should preach the gospel in your marriage. Let's go back and see how this looks. See Ephesians 5:21.

- This was an application of the Gospel Paul made to the whole church. We are to love one another, defer to each other, put each other first, forgive each other, bear with one another in love, be gentle, slow to anger, serve each other...all of these are part of what we do to submit to each other as Paul has defined in the previous chapter. This submission applies to marriage as well.

- In marriage, we submit to one another, wife to husband and husband to wife. In other words, it's mutual submission. But mutual does not mean exactly the same. The way the wife submits and the way the husband submits differs, and that's where Paul begins to unpack how you preach the gospel in your marriage.
- The Bible gives commands to husbands and wives but does not mean that every marriage is the same. The verses we'll study today don't define specific activities or roles. The point is that in all decisions, you adopt the attitude and posture toward one another represented by Christ's love for and relationship with the Church so that your marriage preaches the gospel, no matter who is doing any given task.

1. You should submit to your husband.

Paul begins with wives. See Ephesians 5:22–24.

- A. There is mutual submission in the body of Christ, and so, also between husband and wife, but Paul applies that mutual submission in differing ways to husband and wife.
 - a. He states explicitly that wives should submit to their husbands but does not explicitly state that husbands should submit to their wives.
 - b. He further defines submission as “respect” in verse 33.
- B. It seems misogynistic to tell wives to submit.
 - a. The Gospel's call to wives is neither easy nor popular, but the Gospel's call for husbands is even more difficult and unpopular.
 - b. The Gospel's interests are not the same as our culture, so we shouldn't try to make them fit, rather we should live out the Gospel in our culture and should not seek to conform the Gospel to our culture.
 - c. Talking about culture brings up one possible solution to the difficulty of telling wives to submit to their husbands: couldn't it be that Paul was just speaking to the cultural conditions of the time and since we have a different understanding of equality in marriage now, perhaps wives don't need to submit?
 - i. It is true that the Bible does address many issues specific to the first century culture in which its original hearers lived and these have to be interpreted and the principles applied to our culture.
 - ii. Undoubtedly, Paul had some specific cultural ideas about marriage in mind, perhaps even some of the inconsistencies and injustices he saw in marriages of the time.
 - iii. However, Paul ties his commands about marriage, not to what is culturally convenient, but to the Gospel: he did not say, “Wives, submit to your husbands as is normal in culture,” but “As the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”
 - d. Before we move on to talk about what this submission looks like, we need to make one more important observation.
 - i. To whom does Paul address the command to submit? To wives!

- ii. This is notable for two reasons: the form of Paul's writing was known at the time as a household code and these were usually addressed only to the husband, the man of the house, but here, Paul addresses women directly. He recognizes their inherent value in the Lord and their responsibility and stewardship in the Gospel. The second reason it's notable is because Paul does not tell husbands to make wives submit. That's a really significant distinction from what other household codes of the time did.

C. What does it mean to submit?

- a. Submission means deference to another, especially deference to someone's leadership.
- b. Paul did not say that wives can't lead in some things.
- c. He simply says that they are to submit and that it's their responsibility to do it, not their husband's responsibility to make them submit.
- d. We'll see that Paul does instruct husbands to preach the Gospel in marriage by giving up their lives for their wives as Christ did.
 - i. That's an enormous responsibility and for big responsibilities, there needs to be some level of authority.
 - ii. Imagine that you are given a "leadership position" at your job. They tell you that you will be held responsible for the company's success and your job depends on it. However, you won't have authority to fire anyone, hire anyone, restructure anything, change the budget or basically do anything. Would you want that job? No! Because you wouldn't have the authority you need to do it.
 - iii. When wives submit to their husbands, they willingly give their husbands the authority they need to do what Christ has called them to do in the family.

D. Wives should do this as the Church submits to Christ.

- a. The Church trusts and obeys Christ.
- b. That trust for your husband means that you honor his decisions, not that you can't disagree or have your opinion, but that you submit your opinion out of respect for the responsibility God has given him.
- c. It means that you want to pull with him and for him, not against him.
- d. You get on the same page as your husband.
 - i. What if his direction, decisions, or leadership is something you don't like?
 - ii. Talk to him and let him know.
 - iii. Unless it is sinful, then you should submit.
 - iv. What if he's wrong about a decision or makes a mistake? You can still honor someone who is imperfect. He will sometimes be wrong and make mistakes, but submission includes forgiveness.
 - v. This is not living with abuse.

- e. You should not have a critical spirit, constantly correct, or otherwise lead your husband to believe that you're against him and not for him.
- E. When you submit by respecting and honoring and deferring, you preach the Gospel because this is how the Church acts toward Christ.
 - a. You take up the attitude of Christ who submitted Himself to the Father and took on flesh and became a servant.
 - b. You are not submitting because you are less valuable or less capable, and a wise husband will recognize your capability and enable you in the things you do best.
 - c. Even if your husband is not a believer, you should submit because you are still preaching the Gospel to him. See 1 Peter 3:1-2.
 - d. When you submit to your husband, you ensure that the family continues strong and the Gospel is not reviled. See Titus 2:3-5.
- F. Submission should not be seen as demeaning, but as preaching because it helps hold families together and represents Jesus.

2. You should give yourself up for your wife.

- A. Now we get to the husband's responsibility. See Ephesians 5:25-32.
- B. Husbands should give themselves up for their wives.
 - a. This means putting her needs and even wants above your own.
 - b. There is no room for any high handed behavior or superiority complex here.
 - c. You are not called upon to make your wife submit, but rather to be worthy of submitting to.
 - d. While it is true that God instructs your wife to submit, He instructs you to be a leader in your home worth submitting to.
- C. A wise husband does not try to keep his wife in her place.
 - a. He recognizes her skills and wisdom and encourages her to use them.
 - b. He solicits her input in making decisions, especially if she has more skill or experience in something.
 - c. He does not mask insecurity with machismo but wants to draw the best out of her so that their partnership in marriage can be as successful as possible.
- D. Loving your wife means more than providing for her physically.
 - a. The TV image of a man that works hard and comes home to ignore his family, using all he does at work as an excuse for passivity or anger did not come from God.
 - b. Notice the emphasis Paul places on Christ's example of sanctifying His bride, the Church.
 - c. Husbands can't sanctify their wives in the exact way Christ did—we cannot forgive sins nor can we do the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - d. Husbands should be interested in the spiritual growth and maturity of their wives.
 - i. You should be a spiritual champion in the home.

- ii. That doesn't mean your wife can never lead spiritually, but it means that you should be the biggest proponent of Christlikeness and spiritual growth in your home. Sadly, this is almost never the case. Men abdicate the call God has given them and leave it to their wives. I'm glad that there are many, many women who are capable spiritual leaders and continue to grow and seek the Lord even though their husband's leadership in this realm is severely lacking.
- iii. Spiritual leadership in your home does not necessarily mean that you are the most mature in your home. If your wife is more mature in Christ than you are, you don't have to demand she stops sharing insights from God's Word or leading family devotions or growing in Jesus. Instead, start by becoming the biggest proponent for going to church. Don't leave her on an island to convince your kids that they are coming on Sunday. Don't send her to Wednesday prayer meeting alone because you're tired from work. You don't have to wait until you've got a PH.D. in the New Testament to start leading your family spiritually. Start by championing church.
- iv. Pray for your wife and with your wife. Maybe before bed or before you both head off to work in the morning.
- v. Read the Bible together. You may not always feel profound or have some significant thing to say. I'm going to admit something to you. Neither do I. I often feel pressure when I'm reading the Bible with Andrea because sometimes we're reading along, and I've got nothing profound to say about it. But I'm a pastor. I'm always supposed to have something profound to say about the Bible. But I don't, and neither will you. Get a marriage devotional if you need to. Just begin to push the agenda of your wife's spiritual maturity, not because she can't do it without you but because this is how you are called to preach the Gospel in your marriage. You start to act like Christ by concerning yourself with her wellbeing, especially spiritually.

E. Loving your wife has a reward.

- a. You are to consider your wife as your own flesh.
- b. This is not the "If mama ain't happy ain't nobody happy" nonsense.
 - i. That might be a funny line and we chuckle because it's relatable.
 - ii. Our interest shouldn't just be in keeping the peace but in building up our wives.
- c. You should want your wife to succeed.
- d. You should defer to her expertise, her skills, and her strengths and lead the way in working together to be more Christ-like in all of life.
- e. You should be so invested in these things that it's like it's you doing it.
 - i. That was Christ's attitude.

- ii. He died so that He could have a Bride who was spotless and who would be united to Him.

3. You should date how you want to marry.

- A. Lastly, I want to speak to single people.
- B. Dating should be like reverse engineering marriage.
 - a. If marriage is supposed to reflect Christ's love for the Church and the Church's submission to Christ, that is, if marriage is supposed to be a Gospel presentation from husband to wife and from wife to husband and from the couple to the world, then the way you date should reflect that.
 - b. Date a believer.
 - c. Don't date for fun but for marriage: Hopefully your dating is fun, but that's not the only reason you date.
 - d. Don't live together or have sex prior to marriage.
 - i. This doesn't present the purity or self-sacrificial love God designed marriage for. Instead, it reflects the transactional view of relationships that permeates our culture.
 - ii. You don't get into a relationship in which you both give sacrificially and so honor Christ by trying before you buy to make sure you're getting what you want out of this.
- C. Christian dating is for discovering if that person loves Christ in a manner that will lead them to love you like Christ does.

Conclusion

This is all summarized in the last verse of our passage, see Ephesians 5:33.

You can't control your spouse. You can try and end up with a manipulative, miserable marriage. What you can do is honor Christ. Wives, you can submit in a manner that honors Jesus, regardless of the flaws and mistakes of your husband. Husbands, you can give yourself up for your wife, even when she's difficult. These things aren't controlling, and they're not transactional; they're love. Marriage is an imitation of Christ's love for the Church, so we're going to need some help. We need the Holy Spirit. See Ephesians 5:18.

Take some time to answer these questions:

Wives

- Do I willingly give my husband the authority he needs to lead?
- Does my husband know that I am for him and that I respect and trust him?

- Does my submission to my husband reveal a faithfulness and commitment that preaches to him and to others who see me?
- Do I help my husband rather than constantly criticize?
- Do I support my husband's attempts to lead spiritually?

Husbands

- Am I actively leading spiritually, or have I been passive?
- Am I a champion for Christlikeness and walking in the Spirit, even in my weakness?
- Does my wife know that I want what's best for her and will give up myself to make that happen?
- Do I use authority to serve my wife?
- Am I insecure and upset when my wife doesn't act in what I think is a submissive manner, or do I continue to give up myself for her, even when it's not easy?

Dating

- Am I willing to take on the Gospel responsibility of marriage?
- Does the way I date reflect movement toward a marriage to proclaim the purity and unity of Christ's relationship to the Church?
- Is my dating transactional or Gospel-oriented?