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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Christian Marriage: A Fruitful Garden Protected

Ephesians 5:21-33

Some time ago, I took a tour of the battlefield in Gettysburg, PA... and I was particularly struck by the famous Peach Orchard, where some of the fiercest fighting in the Battle of Gettysburg occurred, on July 2, 1863. As I stood in that peaceful orchard, surrounded by budding peach trees, as I breathed in the fragrance of those blossoms and listened to the sweet chirping of birds, it was hard for me to imagine that such a beautiful garden could be such a fierce battleground. But on that day 153 years ago, the peace was ripped apart by the explosions of cannonfire and musketry, and the screams of wounded and dying men... bullets shredded the peach trees and leaves and blossoms fluttered pathetically to the ground...

How could such a beautiful garden become such a battlefield?

This image is much on my mind as I turn our attention to the topic of Christian marriage in the words of Paul in Ephesians 5:21-33

I. A Fruitful Garden Needing Protection

A. Marriage is One of God's Richest Gifts

1. There is an entire book in the Bible dedicated to the delights of married love... it is called the "Song of Songs" or "Song of Solomon"
2. In it, it likens the delights and pleasures and sensual ecstasies of marriage to a fragrant garden filled with fruit... all different kinds of spices and fruit trees, with a wonderful breeze filling the senses
 - a. This garden imagery is appropriate because it hearkens back to the beginning of the human race... to the Garden of Eden... a

lavishly beautiful creation of God, filled with all kinds of delightful fruit trees, watered by a flowing river

2. Adam, the first man, was created from the dust of the earth and placed in that Garden of Eden and his mandate was clear:

Genesis 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Literally “to serve and protect” the garden

We will discuss these concepts much more in the future... but I just want to put an image in your mind

The “serve” aspect means that Adam was to labor to bring that Garden to its full potential in the plans of the Creator

The “protect” aspect implied a great danger was coming... a danger that Adam would have to protect the Garden from

Christian marriage is a lavishly fruitful garden of delights that God established from the beginning for His glory and our joy

It has been under assault by the ancient serpent, Satan, from the earliest time

MY DESIRE: to use Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 5 and Genesis 2 to call us back to a biblical understanding of marriage

B. Marriage Under Attack NOW

1. The institution of marriage has never been under a more severe attack in our nation’s history than it is right NOW
2. The recent Supreme Court decision establishing gay marriage is the most recent Satanic attack on marriage
 - a. the Justices overturned millennia of jurisprudence precedents to redefine marriage
 - b. In Scandinavia (Denmark, Sweden, Norway) where gay marriage has been legal since the early 1990s, the result has been a clear decline in marriage itself... more and more couples

just simply choose to live together, including fornication, and when they get tired of each other, to move on to other partners

3. But this is only the most recent attack on marriage... marriage has been under attack in America for generations... divorce, “open marriage”, cohabitation, constant marital strife
 - a. Because of faulty assumptions, coupled with the high divorce rate, Tim Keller says that many younger people—what we often call “millennials”—people who reached adulthood somewhere around the year 2000—are increasingly skeptical about the traditional pattern of marriage—one man, one woman, in a binding, exclusive covenant for life

A star of the film *Monogamy* said “In this country, we have kind of failed with marriage. We’re so protective of this really sacred but failed institution. **There’s got to be a new model.**”

C. BUT... NO NEW MODEL NEEDED!

1. We will find everything needed for a fully fruitful, healthy, God-honoring and ultimately joy-filled marriage in the fullness of what Ephesians 1-6 teaches, especially in the clear teaching on marriage of Ephesians 5

II. Marriage a Profound Mystery: Christ and the Church

A. Mystery: An Eternal Truth Kept Hidden

Ephesians 5:31-32 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church.

1. Ephesians 5:32: Paul speaks of marriage as a PROFOUND MYSTERY... but he uses the word differently than we do
2. Not something you can solve with special skills of observation like Sherlock Holmes
3. Like if you have enough insight, or deductive reasoning, or sharp attentive eyes scanning for clues, you can piece it all together...

4. NO... biblical “mystery” is something kept hidden in God but now revealed in Christ for all the world to see
5. Throughout the ages of human history, when one couple after another were joined in marriage in every culture, in every nation on earth, time and time again, a mysterious picture of Christ and his bride, the church, was being lived out

B. Many Will Say “Amen” to How “Mysterious” Marriage Is...!!

Keller imagines some young husband throwing himself down on the bed exasperated after yet another perplexing conflict with his new wife and saying “I’ll NEVER be able to figure her out! Marriage is a TOTAL MYSTERY to me!”

But that’s not the way Paul is using the word “mystery”

The mystery of marriage is that it puts on display the mystical and perfect union between Christ and the church... the unity of God and humanity in a permanent love relationship...

Paul actually says this is a GREAT MYSTERY (NIV “profound mystery”) Greek “mega-mysterion”

The secret of a Christian marriage is that the husband can live out the Christ-role toward his wife, and the wife can live out the church role toward the husband, and in this way the TWO can become ONE in an infinitely deeper way than any of us can possibly imagine

As the husband LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE for his wife, and as the wife WILLINGLY SUBMITS HERSELF to her husband, they become one in the pattern of Christ and the church

The amazing mystery of all this is, when God invented marriage back in the Garden of Eden, he had the gospel in mind, he had Christ and the church in mind

C. This Central Idea Shows the Importance of Christian Marriage in the World

1. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit will this mystery be rightly revealed and demonstrated to a world that needs it desperately!

III. The Biblical Foundation: Matthew 19, Genesis 1-2

A. Matthew 19: Christ's Teaching

Matthew 19:3-6 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?"⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'⁵ 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'?⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

1. In order to understand divorce, we really have to understand God's purpose in marriage
2. Christ goes back to Scripture:
 - a. There are hundreds and hundreds of Christian books and marriage conferences available; many of them are very helpful
 - b. BUT in the end, the scripture is SUFFICIENT to understand marriage
 - c. To every troubled marriage, Jesus is going to ask:

Haven't you read...?

- d. And not just to ANY scripture... to the book that discusses origins... to Genesis

"Haven't you read that AT THE BEGINNING..."

- i) This will immediately bring us to Genesis 1 and Genesis 2

e. The Creator made them male and female (Genesis 1)

- i) Some say Jesus never said anything against homosexuality or anything that would oppose gay marriage
- ii) But I think this statement couldn't be clearer... God made them MALE and FEMALE... gender matters for marriage!!

iii) Also clear from Genesis 1: the complete equality of male and female IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

f. The Creator made a statement about them: **(Genesis 2)**

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and BE UNITED TO (old English... “cleave to”) his wife and the two will become one flesh”

Cleave = to stick or bond close together, remaining faithful in a permanent covenant relationship

3. Jesus’ final command and answer:

“So they are no longer two but one; what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

This is Jesus’ answer on divorce: NO, it is NOT lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason! God has joined them together and made them ONE... so we have no right to separate them

When a man and a woman take marriage vows, something mystical and amazing happens... God joins them and makes them ONE...they have no right to separate. They have promised to love and cherish each other, forsaking all others, till death parts them.

Jesus’ answer was FOUNDED on the Creator’s expressed intentions in Genesis...

B. Genesis 1: Equally Created in the Image of God... Equally Vital to God’s Plan for the Human Race

C. Genesis 2: Special Roles

1. God created the man first and alone

Genesis 2:7 the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

2. God gave the man special instructions

Genesis 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it

3. God asserted it was not good for the man to remain alone

Genesis 2:18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

The "HELPER SUITABLE" = perfectly apportioned for him; his counterpart in every way

Suitable physically... able to reproduce... to be fruitful and multiply

Suitable relationally... able to have an intimate friendship, committed relationship similar to the Trinity

Suitable spiritually... able to relate to God as well as to him

4. No suitable helper found among the animals

5. God made the woman from the rib of the man

6. Adam celebrates and names his wife

7. The universal statement about marriage

Genesis 2:24-25 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. ²⁵ The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

D. This is the LASTING and PERMANENT Definition of Marriage

IV. The Christian Foundation: The Spirit-Filled Life

A. The Context in Ephesians

1. Two parts of the book

a. Ephesians 1-3: the saving work of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

b. Ephesians 4-6: how Christians should live in the world

2. Christian marriage is founded on our salvation: election and redemption

Ephesians 1:4-5 For God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ

We are able to have God-honoring marriage because we have been CHOSEN and PREDESTINED to be his sons

Ephesians 1:7-8 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

We are able to have God-honoring marriages because we have been COMPLETELY FORGIVEN through the blood of Christ... we are blameless positionally in Christ; so this gives power for the continual forgiveness of sins each Christian spouse needs to do... your Christian spouse has already been atoned for by the blood of Christ, and so have you! So you can quickly and deeply forgive sins

AND he gave you all wisdom and understanding to KNOW what marriage is and what the will of the Lord is for you

AND you see the big picture of how your marriage fits into God's plan for the universe:

Ephesians 1:9-10 ... to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

a. Also, we have the INDWELLING SPIRIT:

Ephesians 1:13-14 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance

b. This sealing of the Spirit is essential to a Christian marriage... for the Spirit continually testifies with our spirits that we are God's children, destined for heaven when we die

- c. Ephesians 2:1-10 makes it plain that both the husband and the wife are SINNERS SAVED BY GRACE... unmerited favor; so we are not shocked when the spouse sins, but we are able BOTH to see them covered in the grace of God, and to extend that grace yourself

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

- d. Your marriage is also one of the most important GOOD WORKS that God has ordained for you to do:

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

- e. This enables you to see your marriage and parenting in light of eternity: your marriage serves God's purpose in building his eternal dwelling place... the true heavenly church

Ephesians 2:21-22 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

3. The love of God is poured out into your hearts by the Holy Spirit...this teaches you how to love each other

Ephesians 3:16-19 grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

A Christian marriage is thus not a union of two desperate, lonely, empty people trying to find fulfillment in the other person... we are actually filled to the fullness of God in Christ! We come together to share that fullness with each other

If a Christian is SINGLE and never marries, he or she is still a FULFILLED BEING... your fullness is in Christ

If a Christian is WIDOWED, bereaved, loses a cherished spouse, they are not EMPTY, DESOLATE people with no meaning in life! Our fullness is in Christ!

And even in a normal, Christian marriage, each of the spouses doesn't desperately need in a clingy, unhealthy way the other person

B. Next... How Then Shall We Live?

Ephesians 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

A Christian marriage is a PART of that Christian's life... it should be a marriage worthy of the calling we have received

It is based on the ONENESS we already have in Christ:

Ephesians 4:2-6 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

These words find their fulfillment in a Christian marriage... the need for humility, gentleness, bearing with one another in love!!

We have to MAKE EVERY EFFORT to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of love! It is a daily battle to be truly ONE in marriage... one mind, one heart, one purpose... even as we worship the same God and are atoned for by the same cross...

There will be a MASSIVE WAR on your unity – the world, the flesh, and the devil will fight your marriage

Paul defines the need for HOLINESS as a battle for the mind: (Eph. 4:19-22)

We must no longer live as the gentiles do in the futility of a darkened mind... so if a man wants to be a Christian husband, he must

PUT OFF the old man, be renewed in the spirit of his mind, and PUT ON the new self, created to be like God in TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS and HOLINESS; the same for a Christian wife... for her to be the submissive, godly, loving wife she must be, she has to do the same – put off the old self, be made new in the mind, and put on the new self

We need to heed the basic issues of sanctification: especially at the end of Ephesians 4 and on into 5:

Ephesians 4:31 - 5:2 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Here especially we must guard the sexual purity that is essential to a holy marriage! So much heartbreak comes from sexual immorality!

We Christians know that absolute sexual purity is essential to a healthy marriage:

Ephesians 5:3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

C. The Spirit-Filled Life

1. The culmination of these practical guidelines for holiness is found in the simple command:

Ephesians 5:18 ... be filled with the Spirit

2. The Spirit-filled life is a life controlled, empowered, guided by the Holy Spirit
3. The Spirit INDWELLS every Christian... but the Spirit does not always FILL every Christian
4. As we are filled with the Spirit, we can carry out our roles

- a. The grammar leads right to the role of the wife... one command (BE BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT)... followed by a series of participles ('ing-words) that tell us what Paul means:

Ephesians 5:18-22 be filled with the Spirit: ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music to the Lord in your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ ¶ submitting to one another in the fear of Christ. ²² *Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord*

- b. The Spirit-filled life is one characterized by joyful worship, both with each other and in your own heart
- c. The Spirit-filled life is characterized by constant THANKFULNESS in any and every situation
- d. AND the Spirit-filled life is characterized by SUBMITTING in the fear of the Lord, in the ways Paul is about to describe
- e. The first being the wife's submission to her own husband as to the Lord

5. Application:

- a. The key to a happy, fruitful, fulfilling marriage is the filling of the Spirit
- b. If you are filled with the Spirit, you will not have the marital problems that characterize non-Christians
- c. Being filled with the Spirit is not magic... it involves taking in God's truth that the Holy Spirit already indwells you... and ASKING Him to fill you, to control you... confess any known sin... ask Him to move you to keep God's commands
- d. At any moment in your marriage, take the test of the fruit of the Spirit:
- e. If you are not characterized by LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, SELF-CONTROL...

6. You are not at that moment filled with the Spirit... only SIN can cause you to stop being filled with the Spirit... so ask the Spirit to reveal your sin to you; confess it, appropriate the blood of Christ to cover your sin... then pray that the Spirit will fill you... walk in faith that he has filled you, and start obeying his commands

Direct appeal to non-Christians: the kind of marriage Paul is about to describe is impossible if you have not been born-again! Stop right now, and ask the Lord Jesus Christ to be your Savior and Lord! It is astonishing what the Lord can do to a marriage that's in crisis if the husband and the wife both turn to the Lord for salvation... I have heard so many testimonies of how a man and woman trusting in Christ saved their marriage

V. An Overview of Marital Roles: Submission and Love

A. Not "Mutual Submission"... But Mutual Self-Denial

1. A very common misconception comes from Ephesians 5:21

Ephesians 5:21 submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

2. It is called the doctrine of "mutual submission"
 - a. In one sense, if all you had was Ephesians 5:21 and you didn't know how the verb there is used in the rest of the New Testament, you might think that every Christian is being commanded to submit to every other Christian
 - b. This is a foundational concept for egalitarian (feminist) marriages... mutual submission means that we always submit to each other, like this:

Philippians 2:3-4 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

- c. They define submission as humble, loving servanthood... something we Christians readily acknowledge is to be part of every relationship we have

3. BUT this verse is NOT teaching that... because that's not what biblical submission is
4. Submission: originally was a military term meaning to arrange yourself in ranks under a commanding officer
5. Everywhere this word is used in the New Testament, it gives a clear sense of OBEDIENCE TO GOD-ORDAINED AUTHORITY

Biblical submission = a Christian willingly and gladly arranging himself or herself under God-ordained authority, obeying that authority from the heart as an act of worship to the Lord

- a. Luke 2:51, Jesus obeyed his parents
 - b. Luke 10:17, the demons obeyed the seventy-two missionaries that Jesus sent out
 - c. Romans 8:7, the mind of the flesh is hostile to God, it does not SUBMIT to God's law
 - d. Romans 13:1, everyone must obey the governing authorities
 - e. AND there are many other such examples
 - f. NOTE: there is not a single exception... everywhere this word "submit" is used, it always has to do with obeying God-ordained authority
6. SO, the idea of "mutual submission" makes as much sense as the idea of mutual obedience... like between parents and children: sometimes they obey us, and sometimes we obey them... NO!!
 7. So, when Paul says "submitting to one another in the fear of the Lord," he means
 - a. IN THE PATTERNS I'M ABOUT TO DESCRIBE
 - b. Wives to your own husbands
 - c. Children to your parents,
 - d. Slaves to your masters

8. Along with that, though, he gives very clear instructions to the ones in authority
 - a. Husbands LOVE your wives
 - b. Fathers, bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord
 - c. Masters, deal with your slaves in such a way that you always remember you have a master in heaven yourselves
9. IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD... a deep reverence for Jesus

B. The Command to the Wife: Submit

Ephesians 5:22-24 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 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. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

C. The Command to the Husband: Love

Ephesians 5:25-30 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- ³⁰ for we are members of his body.

Ephesians 5:31-33 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

We'll be going over these commands more in detail over the next two weeks, God willing!

VI. Two Clear Implications

A. Embrace Your Corresponding Role

Piper: “Husbands and wives should consciously copy the relationship God intended for Christ and the church.”

Wives are to take their unique cue from the purpose of the church... submitting to their husbands as the church submits to Christ

Husbands are to take their unique cue from the self-sacrificial love Christ displays for the church

1. More and more gender confusion in our day and age
2. Key question: **a boy could ask his father, “Dad, what does it mean for me to be a man and not a woman?”**
3. **Or a girl could ask her mother: “What does it mean for me to be a woman and not a man?”**
4. Modern spirit of the age has almost NO ANSWER to that question!
5. But for me, I would start with the different roles specified here in marriage
 - a. Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands; but husbands are not commanded to submit to their wives
 - b. Husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... the clearly masculine role of protection, leadership, provision is given to the husband not the wife.
6. We’ll be unfolding those more in detail over the next two weeks

B. Find Your Delight in the Joy of Your Spouse

1. One of the most unforgettable lessons from John Piper’s *Desiring God*... true love means to find your own delight in the delight of your spouse

2. The irony of the self-centered “me-ism” of modern marriage is that the people are actually NOT COMMITTED ENOUGH to their own happiness... there is a far greater happiness available for husbands and wives who will learn to immerse themselves fully in their mate’s happiness
3. Marriage he calls the “Matrix for Christian hedonism”
 - a. Hedonism = the pursuit of pleasure
 - b. Clearly, the husband should pursue his joy in laying down his life for his wife

Christ died for the church to present her to himself as a radiant church...

It was CHRIST’S DELIGHT to purify, sanctify, beautify the church... he will enjoy her for all eternity as she is holy in heaven

SO ALSO, it should be the husband’s delight to love his wife as his own body:

HE WHO LOVES HIS WIFE LOVES HIMSELF... a clear appeal to hedonism... to a life that is maximally joyful

The most joy a husband can experience in this world is the joy of a beautiful, sanctified wife who gives herself to him freely and purely as the church does to Christ... he who invests love in his wife will be drawing out the dividends for years to come

- c. The problem in marriage is that the husband and/or the wife pursues their own joy INDEPENDENT of the spouse... selfishly pursuing their own pleasures at the expense of the spouse

C. Application

1. Married couples: go home and read this section out loud to each other
2. Pray together and ask God to fulfill this pattern in your marriage
3. See if there’s any sin that needs forgiving