

“Marriage: A Picture of Perfect Love”

Feb. 15, 2015

Kitwe Church

I hope everyone had a great Valentine’s Day yesterday. It is meant to be a celebration of love and that applies to all of us in all ages because God is love and he demonstrated his love for all of us. For those of you who are married, I hope it had even more significance to you and that you were able to spend some special time together to invest in your relationship and grow your love. Marriage is a wonderful thing. It is truly the greatest gift God has given us apart from our salvation and today we are going to see why that is so. Whether you are married or not, I am sure all of us have been blessed by those extraordinarily solid messages that inspire and impact us. Today we are going to see why marriage is so special and it might not be what you are thinking. It is because marriage is designed by God to be a picture of his perfect love for his bride – the church.

You might say, “Marriage? A picture of perfect love? Oh, I don’t know about that. Marriage has some rough times.” I agree, every marriage has its share of dark valleys, but that actually contributes to the picture of perfect love and I hope by the end of today you will see that even more clearly and have a newfound appreciation for the institution of marriage.

When people think of Zambia, what one image comes to mind for most people? The Majestic Victoria Falls. That image is instantly associated with this country. It is on nearly every website and brochure. It is an icon.

There are lots of ways we try to capture such images. Here are some drawings that my children did of Victoria Falls. Not bad! We can all identify it, but a photograph makes the image clearer. Most of us love to use tiny, digital cameras when we travel to a place like Victoria Falls. They are easy to carry, but the larger and more complex the image we want to capture the more it becomes nearly impossible to represent it well and completely with our little cameras. Even when we use a big camera it just doesn’t do it justice. No single photograph can show someone how magnificent Victoria Falls is. The shortcomings of the photographer do nothing to diminish the majesty and natural wonder of that amazing place. But, some photos do give a better idea than others of how majestic it is. We all want those clearer kinds of pictures of Victoria Falls, right?

Well, God intended marriage to be the earthly picture of his divine love. God designed marriage to be a picture of the love Christ has for His bride – the Church. The question that each married person must ask is, “how clear and well-focused is the portrait of Jesus that our marriage is displaying?” Just like no photo will fully capture the magnificence of Victoria Falls so no marriage will fully display the glory of Christ’s love for the church. But I do want my marriage to offer the clearest, most well focused portrait possible.

For those of us who are not yet married, but are open to the possibility of it some day then we must be preparing ourselves to be the cameras that capture the image of Jesus and put it on display in our marriages. The more prepared you are now, the more success you will have in your future marriage. For those of you who have already experienced the joys of marriage, but your husband or wife has passed on I hope that you will be reminded of good memories and that you will see your marriage in a new light that makes you appreciate it even more. My prayer is that each of us regardless of our marital status will leave here with a greater appreciation for marriage and what it symbolizes.

In Ephesians 5:22-33 we find what is probably the greatest passage of scripture on the husband and wife, for that wonderful union of man & woman in the bonds of marriage is likened unto the union of Christ and His church.

Since God is love and the Bible is God's word, you would expect to see this love in all 66 books of the Bible. This is certainly true of the book of Ephesians.

- In Eph. 1:3-5 we see that God loved us. This is the same message we heard in Week 1 of this series: Finding Perfect Love.
- As a result of God's love, we love God which was the focus of the second message entitled "Responding to Perfect Love" (Eph. 3:14-19)
- As a result of loving God we also love fellow mankind, which we saw in last week's message, "Getting a Handle on Love that Never Fails." We see that same message echoed in Eph. 4:32-5:2, 15-21. This passage sets the tone of what we will look at today. The tone is one of submission in all our relationships.
- Now, in today's passage this love is put on display in the most dramatic of fashions within a committed marriage relationship between one man and one woman.

Ephesians 5:22-33

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. **28** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." **32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. **33** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

In this passage the apostle Paul gives instructions both to the husband & to the wife. Let's begin with the man.

1. The Husbands' love must accurately portray the love of Jesus.

A. Sacrificial Love v. 25

- We all know that nothing is easier than saying words of love, and nothing harder than living them day by day.
- **Jesus promised His love & then proved it on the cross.**
- He gave himself up for the church. What did that look like? He left the comfort of heaven and the praise of angels to come here and give himself up in two ways.
 - He lived for us:
 - In Mark 10:45 Jesus said of himself, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." He came to serve us!
 - He had no home. He traveled and slept on the road and in other people's homes.
 - He had no privacy. Twelve men were always with him.
 - He had no personal time (the disciples woke him on the boat, the sick would interrupt his teaching, his holidays for rest turned into ministry times).
 - People were always coming to him with their problems.
 - Jesus was a king without a kingdom. He made himself a servant. Read Philippians 2:5-8.
 - He died for us:

- In John 10:17-18 Jesus said, “I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”
- In Luke 23:24 Jesus looks down at his murderers and prays, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Some of those people later became his followers. The Roman soldier confessed that same day, “Surely this man was the son of God.”

Men, what do we sacrifice in order to demonstrate love to our wives?
 How do we live for them? How do we die for them?
 Jesus loved sacrificially. He lived for his bride and he died for his bride.
 But his love is also a sanctifying love.

B. Sanctifying Love v. 26-27

- The reason Jesus gave up his life for his bride was to sanctify his church. The word sanctify means to set-apart for something special. He gave himself up in order to set his people apart as special rather than common.
- Think back to your wedding day. That day in your marriage ceremony you were set apart for each other. The husband is set apart to belong to the wife and the wife is set apart to belong to the husband.
- Now, let’s think of what we do with things we have that are set apart as special to us. We don’t let them get damaged. We keep them clean. Jesus cleansed his church by the washing of water with the Word.
- Husbands, how can we follow in the pattern of Jesus? We should be the spiritual head of the household, not just the administrative head of the household.
- The love of the husband for his wife ought to be cleansing to both her and him so that they are both becoming more like Christ.
- Every part of married life should have this effect. 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 teaches us that even their sexual relationship as man and wife should be so controlled by God that it becomes a means of spiritual enrichment as well as personal enjoyment.
- As husbands it should be our goal to work in cooperation with Jesus to ensure we and our wives stand before him as holy, blameless, without spot and wrinkle. Spiritually, we want to be just as radiant and beautiful to him as our wives were to us physically on the day we married them.
- So, it is a sacrificial love, a sanctifying love and it is also a satisfying love.

C. Satisfying Love v. 28-30

- This love is so amazing that it actually makes two become one: physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
- Whatever each one does to the other, he does to himself or herself. It is mutually satisfying.
- When the husband loves his wife the way Christ loved the church then he will find that as he loves her he strengthens her and nourishes her. A well-nourished person is not hungry.
- Pastor Warren Wiersbe said it this way. “There should be no starvation for love in the Christian home, for the husband and the wife should so love each other that their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs are met. If both are submitted to the Lord, and to each other, they will be so satisfied that they will not be tempted to look anywhere else for fulfillment.”
- Husbands, what does all this mean for us?
 - We must live for our wives.
 - We provide for them. – financially, emotionally, physically,

- We serve them. – We must sacrifice our hobbies, our rest, our prized possessions in order to free up the time and resources to serve our wives.
 - We must die for our wives. How do we do that? In several ways. We must die to our selves by dying to our desires and dying to our pride.
 - We must protect them by being the spiritual heads of our homes. – Praying together, reading the bible together, making sure everyone is going to church, setting a godly example in word and in deed
 - We must protect them from physical danger. – When we hear a noise at night it is our job to check it out, not theirs. If we travel we must make sure they are secure while we are away. Buy them a gun and teach them how to use it. Oh, and don't forget jujitsu.
- Now wives, if your husband loves you that way then wouldn't you find it easy to love him back? Let's look to verses 22-24 to see how you can do that.

2. The Wife's love must accurately portray the love of the Church for Jesus.

A wife's love for her husband must be submissive and respectful.

A. Submissive Love v.22

Now, we must address the negative connotation that comes to most people's minds when they hear this word submission.

i. What submission is not:

- Many view this term as demeaning and showing inferiority. This is not the Biblical meaning we see in this text. Submission due to inferiority, fear, or subjection in marriage is a distortion of God's intended picture of Christ and the church.
- Mankind is Christ's highest creation. He sees us as valuable, not inferior. His sacrifice on the cross is evidence of that.
- Christ came to bring freedom (Galatians 5:1).
- Christ came to conquer fear – Perfect love casts out all fear (I John 4:18)

ii. What submission is:

- Both genders are equally created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28).
- Both genders are heirs together of eternal life (Galatians 3:28-29)
- This passage is not teaching that all women must submit to all men. It says, "to your own husband."
- This submission of a wife to her husband's leadership is for the health of the marriage relationship.
- This is God ordering the marriage relationship according to his design. Both husband and wife are equally valuable, but they have different roles to play. It is not an issue of inferiority. It is an issue of function. It is not an issue of domination, but of God ordained authority.

iii. Why is a wife's submission to her husband reasonable?

- First, because the entire context is one of submission. Remember, all Christians are supposed to submit to one another (v. 21). This is putting the needs of others above your own. This is the agape love Phil spoke of from 1 Corinthians 13 last week. If we as Christians who may not even know each other all that well should submit to one another it is only reasonable that we submit to the order God has established in our homes rather than assert our selfishness on those closest to us. Wives, this is not subjugation. We submit to one another. If a husband is going to be the leader that God expects him to be he will have to submit the meeting of his desires and needs in order that he can first attend to

meeting the desires and needs of his wife. The husband serves his wife by loving and leading. The wife serves her husband by respecting and submitting.

- Second, since marriage is a picture of Christ and the Church the wife must submit because of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
 - As we have just seen, Jesus came as a servant who sacrificed by his life and his death to show his perfect love.
 - When the Christian wife submits herself to Christ and lets Him be Lord of her life, she will have no difficulty submitting to her husband. She is demonstrating her trust in Jesus for all her needs and her welfare.
 - His sacrifice has proven that he can be trusted. Now we must obey Him.
 - In John 14:15 Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” These were the words of Jesus to his bride, the church. He already proved his love sacrificially. He now says that he expects that his love would be returned to him in the form of submissive obedience to his commands. One of those commands is that the wife submit to the leadership of her husband.
- Third, God designed the marriage relationship in such a way that the man would be the head of the home because he portrays the headship of Jesus Christ over the church.
 - No institution can function with two heads. There always needs to be one person that is ultimately responsible for the welfare of that institution. Everyone in the organization works in different roles and functions for the success of the team, but there can only be one head.
 - Now think about the truly well run institutions. They operate by the philosophy that the head of that organization is a servant to all those that they lead. The head protects those under his leadership by taking responsibility for the failures, but he gives credit to the individuals who worked hard to bring about the successes.
 - The husband and father should serve his wife and children for the health of their family
 - The husband and father should protect them, encourage them, and praise them.
 - Think of it this way. We have already looked at the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He has made it clear what he expects our homes to be like. Who did he put as the head of the home to ensure that it functions the way it is designed? The man. So when there are problems, as the big boss, who is Jesus going to come to when corrections are needed? The man. Who is he holding accountable and disciplining in order to bring about corrections when needed? The man. Women, do you see how Jesus is lovingly protecting you by putting you under the authority of your husband? He is putting a buffer between you and the discipline that is needed. This is a blessing for you. Why would you want the responsibility that God has chosen to give to your husband? Your husband must bear that weight. This should cause submitting to your husband to be a joy and relief. Mandy defines submission this way: Ducking so God can hit your husband.
 - This is God’s design. If we try to use God’s creation of marriage in a way that contradicts his design then we can expect dysfunction and destruction. If we use his creation according to his design we can expect function and construction.

B. Respectful Love v. 33

- We have dealt with the issue of submission, but I think it is evident to all of us that there can be submission without respect simply for the sake of survival. This is not an accurate portrayal of Christ and the Church.
- We don't just want to survive in our marriages. We don't want to tolerate something just to get through it. We want to experience vibrant, loving, romantic, satisfying marriages. Satisfying emotionally, spiritually, and physically.
- This is not something that is unattainable, but wives it will take more than just submission. It will take respect.
- You must value him. He needs to know you are proud to be his wife. He needs to know that you recognize his accomplishments; that you appreciate when he sacrifices his own needs and desires to meet yours; that you feel secure because of his provision and protection.
- God has created us as men and women to be different but complimentary. The highest goal is not independence, but rather interdependence. We need each other.
- Man's greatest need is respect. Woman's greatest need is security.
- God has even designed us to relate to one another in a cyclical pattern that causes us to grow deeper in love as the cycle continues. When a man feels respected he will pour more energy into providing security for his wife. When the wife feels secure the respect she has for her husband will continue to grow in such a way that is evident to her husband and everyone else.
- Wives, what does that mean for you?
 - Stop battling with your husband for control in your marriage. Trust God's plan. Trust your husband's love and submit to his leadership.
 - Duck so God can hit your husband.
 - Respect is choosing to overlook the irritations and emphasize the admirable.
 - Don't make comments that would embarrass him in front of others. Don't be putting him down or comparing him to others in an unfavorable way.
 - Be polite – Say Please and thank you.
 - Be gentle. Don't be harsh, demanding, complaining, bossy, nagging.
 - Be responsive. This is especially important in the physical realm of your marriage. Never use sex as a tool to control him or a weapon to punish him.

3. The Devotion of Marriage must accurately portray the church being separated from the world.

A. The Sanctity of Marriage v. 31-32

- There are approximately 7 billion people on the earth right now. Let's say that is 3.5 billion men and 3.5 billion women. When we get married, we make a commitment to remain faithful to one specific person out of the 3.5 billion others. We forsake all others to cling to just one until death separates us. There should be no adultery taking place. Marriage should be pure and undefiled. This too is a picture of Christ and the church.
- The church literally means, "the called out ones." God has called us out from the world to be his own special people. We still live in the world, but we are set apart for God. When a Christian lives like an unbeliever the Bible compares it to adultery. A worldly Christian is committing spiritual adultery against Jesus, the husband of the church.

B. The Purpose of Marriage

Okay, so marriage means that you have been set apart for one another. But now we must ask what He designed it for? God established marriage for many reasons.

- **Functionally**, our earthly marriages exist to meet the needs of one another:
 - It meets our emotional needs – *Philia- affectionate regard between equals* (Gen. 2:18 – It is not good that man should be alone)
 - It meets our social needs – *Storge – familial love especially toward children or parents (not found in scripture)* (Gen. 1:28 – It provides the atmosphere for raising children and continuing the human race).
 - It meet our physical needs – *Eros-sexual passion (not found in scripture)* (1 Cor. 7:1-3) – It is the proper place for a man and a woman to fulfill the God-given sexual desires.
 - It meets our spiritual needs *Agape – self-sacrificing love; the highest form of love* (Eph. 5:22-33) – As the husband and wife experience with each other the submission to Christ and the love of Christ.
- **Symbolically**: When we choose to become a Christian it is like accepting Christ's proposal of marriage. In the Christian life we experience the joy of that relationship as he meets our need for security, identity, and righteousness.
- The highest calling of mankind is to glorify God and enjoy his presence forever.
- Symbolically, marriage exists to display the covenant keeping love between Christ and the Church. This is its ultimate purpose of our earthly marriages.

Conclusion:

Wow! What an amazing thought to think that our marriages are intended to be a picture of Christ and the church. If people were to look at your marriage, how accurate of a portrayal would it be to the perfect love that Christ has for the church?

I am sure that question convicts us all. I am sure that there are some areas each of us sees that requires some improvement, both in our relationships with our spouses and our relationship with our Savior.

Let me leave you with these encouraging reminders:

1. Real love is something beyond the warmth and glow of romance. It is caring as much about the welfare & happiness of your marriage partner as about your own. But real love is not total absorption in each other. It is looking outward in the SAME direction – together as one flesh.
2. **Love make burdens lighter** – because you divide them. **It makes joys more intense** – because you share them. **It makes you stronger** – so you can reach out and become involved with life in ways you dared not risk alone.
3. To the **husband** the command is to **Love & Lead** your wife.
4. To the **wife** the command is to – **submit to and respect your husband.**
5. What you promised on your wedding day must be renewed and rededicated every day.
6. God alone is the one who can give you a strong marriage. You can't do it in your own strength but he can produce it for you when you both submit to him.
7. As long as you obey God's command and apply God's Word to your marriage – you will truly know what it is to live in the joys of Holy Matrimony.