



Marriage is more than it appears

“But this is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.”

(Ephesians 5:32)

In Ephesians 5, Paul lifts marriage to an exalted level when he aligns the duties of a husband and a wife with those of Christ and his church. A man must love his wife as Christ loved his church. A woman must submit to the authority of her husband as the church submits to that of the Lord Jesus Christ. This makes marriage an extraordinarily exalted thing.

However, in verse 32, Paul shows that this alignment was no mere coincidence. Marriage is a *profound mystery*. That means that marriage has always contained deeper meaning within it known only to God, but which have now been revealed by Jesus Christ. The intimate relationship of a man and woman in marriage is more than it seems to be. Jesus Christ unfolds yet another mystery long hidden and invisible to the church.

When Paul says, *“but I am talking about Christ and the church,”* he has moved on to something more elevated than marriage. It seemed that he was instructing the church about marriage, but he was in fact instructing the church about what marriage pointed to. The union between man and woman in marriage is not an ultimate institution, holy in itself; the union between Christ and his church is. As beautiful as marriage might be, it is comparatively meaningless and shallow apart from Jesus Christ.

This passage indicates that when God created the world, He set as a first goal to gather a church together and unite it to himself in perfect fellowship. This is the ultimate purpose for mankind's existence. However, that fellowship would be accomplished through his Son. God's Son would become Lord over the church through an act of saving love.

God designed marriage to encourage, train and exemplify the servant-lordship of Jesus Christ over the church, and the dignity of submission by the church toward her Lord. In the verses prior to Ephesians 5:23, it seemed that Paul was talking about marriage but it turns out that he was talking about what it illustrated: the relationship between Christ and His church.

We cannot, therefore, esteem marriage too highly. God joins his sons and daughters together in marriage and urgently calls them to live in the light of the profound mystery. For husbands, this means that they must take an example from Christ servant-lordship; for wives it means that they must strive for the dignity of submission as the church demonstrates it. Husbands and wives must together exemplify these qualities for the benefit of the community – because their marriage is not just about themselves. As the union of marriage is the foundation for society, union with God is the foundation for life. Marriage must demonstrate this foundational relationship with God.

What a calamity it is, then, for a husband to tyrannically enforce his authority over his wife. God calls a man to give himself sacrificially to his wife as her most devoted servant. Then she will be able to find dignity in submitting to his authority. What a calamity it is when a woman rejects the authority of her husband. God calls her to honour his office as her husband. He depends on her submission to fulfil that office effectively. How else can marriage be the profound mystery?

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