

Unsolved Mysteries
Marriage: From Mystery to Clarity- Session #7
Small Group Notes

Introduction:

Why do you think marriage is important to God? What are ways that in the church we can devalue marriage, explicitly or implicitly?

How have you seen marriage done God's way be an example to others or yourself?

What are questions that you have about marriage?

Read Ephesians 5:21-33

Discuss: How do we move from mystery to clarity (in our marriage)?

1. Marriage models the relationship between Christ and the church

- What is the purpose of marriage? (Read Ephesians 5:31-32)
- Marriage is gospel reenactment
- The goal of marriage is holiness, not merely happiness

Explain: As Paul finalized his instructions to husbands and wives, he emphasized that the expression of unity in a marriage goes far beyond sex. It includes every area of a couple's life and relationship. A couple's unity is based on recognizing that previous family ties are to be reprioritized after marriage. Husbands and wives are intentionally to leave their parents. Their primary human loyalty is to each other.

Ask:

What are ways that we can off emphasize the wrong things in marriage? What are the implications of not seeing the correct purpose in marriage?

How have you seen loyalty expressed in marriage? How does this express the nature of the gospel? (Read Romans 8:38-39)

2. Submission is the key

- Read Ephesians 5:21
- What does submission mean? To willingly and consistently place other people ahead of you.
- Mutual submission is a key to any healthy relationship (read Ephesians 5:22, Genesis 3:16)
- Submission does not mean:
 - o The inferiority of the woman
 - o The dominance of the man

- Unconditional obedience by the woman
- Independent decision-making on the part of the man
- Your decision to submit to your spouse out of reverence to Christ creates the potential for God to do something truly great in your marriage.

Explain: In Christian fellowship we must be willing to learn from and submit to others, even from those who differ from us in age, gender, or stage in life. Paul transitioned then to apply the concept of submission to marriage. In the ancient world, women had few legal rights and were considered unworthy of education. Husbands often treated their wives as fit only for keeping house and raising children. However, Paul showed how Christian wives have great dignity that are not objects, instead they just as valuable to marriage.

Ask:

How would you define submission? How is it the same or different from what you read in the Bible? Why does the word tend to stir up controversy? Why should it not be controversial?

How is Jesus' work on the cross an example of submission for us?

3. There has to be order in war

- Read Ephesians 5:23, Genesis 1:27
- We are equal in the sight of God and yet different for His purposes
- We are often acting more like parents towards one another in our marriages instead of as spouses

Explain: On the basis of a wives personal relationship with Jesus, they are to submit to their husbands and their leadership. Paul showed how submission really acts more as an act of service to Christ. Though Ephesians 5 is often quoted to remind women of their struggle of submission, it is the husband who actually receives an even greater challenge from God. He must love with the love of Jesus. It is clear though that each action serves the other. The wife, in submitting, encourages her husband to Christ-likeness and the husband, in loving like Jesus, makes it easier for the wife to submit.

Ask:

What happens in a marriage that lacks love and respect? What about other relationships?

How can living out God's marriage ideals be difficult? In what ways can it be rewarding?

4. Love is more than a feeling

- Read Ephesians 5:25
- Unconditionally loving your spouse is a reminder of God's love for you

- God wants your spouse to feel His touch in her life, and He has chosen you to do it.

Explain: The best love-pattern to follow is Christ, who gave Himself in sacrificial death for His beloved. These verses apply not only to husbands, but also to their friends and families. They are to support and honor a husband's love for his wife and do nothing to challenge, diminish, or otherwise interfere in his relationship with her.

Ask:

What are conditions that we try to put on our marriages? Why does having conditions to our love, not really an expression of love?

What are ways that we can sometimes misuse the word unconditional in marriage? How could this impact the relationships that we seek (if we are single) or have (as married)?

5. Someone has to die for the marriage to live

- Read Ephesians 5:25

Explain: The mystery was that the redeemed and the Lord Jesus are joined together in one body, which a godly marriage reflects. Thus, on the one hand, Christian husbands (and wives) look to Jesus' sacrificial self-giving as the supreme example of love. On the other hand, a godly, "one-flesh" marriage visibly models the one-flesh relationship between Christ (the Bridegroom-Head) and His people (the bride-body).

Ask:

What are things that we maybe need to die to in our marriages in order for it to live?

Why do you think so much of the Bible is devoted to teaching about marriage and family relationships? What should we learn from this fact?

What elements do you believe are vital to a good, godly marriage? Which of these needs the most attention in your marriage? What is something you can do to focus on it?

For those that are divorced: Understand that God still has a plan and a purpose for your life, even though your marriage did not go the way that you or your former spouse ever dreamt would happen. Let this discussion be a way to begin to restore from the broken pieces of your marriage to understanding your identity in Christ and then to see how God's grace will work through your life.