



Reflecting Our Relationship With God

We need to live our lives knowing that we have been created for intimate union with God.

by Dr. David Kyle Foster

We, as born again believers, need to live our lives in the knowledge of the fact that God has married us, both corporately, as the Body of Christ, and individually, as sons and daughters who He loves with such intensity that He was willing to let evil men torture Him on a Cross in order to win our hearts.

We need to live our lives in the knowledge that, in fact, the end for which we have been created is just such an intimate union with God—that our marriage with God is designed to kick in with all cylinders when we give our lives in covenant commitment to Him at the point of our new birth – and that what God hath joined to Himself, no man can put asunder. This is one of the great mysteries of God. It is for this that we were born and that Christ died and rose again.

The final text for our study is the primary one from which such a claim is derived – Eph 5:21-32:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

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

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Three observations can be made in regard to our text:

1. It is a logical conclusion that what is true of the whole (Christ the Bridegroom marrying His Bride, the Church) can legitimately be seen as true for the parts of that whole (that each individual member of the Bride can be seen as marrying the Bridegroom).
2. In the Eph 5 passage, Paul uses Gen 2:24 as his proof text, which uses the idiom "two becoming one flesh" for which *The MacArthur Study Bible* footnote reads: "One flesh speaks of a complete unity of parts making a whole."
3. It is common to find multiple levels of meaning in biblical texts, especially metaphorical ones.

There has been a tradition throughout the Christian era, especially in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, of seeing an individual "mystical marriage" as part of the greater corporate marriage between God and man. I am not suggesting, as pagan religions have done, that we are to unite sexually with God. God is a spirit and the realms of heaven transcend earthly sexual need or behavior. What I am suggesting is that the metaphor of Christ marrying the Church can be taken individually by believers as well as the more common understanding of it being a corporate union.

This explains why in heaven we are no longer married or given in marriage. The final and eternal wedding has occurred and there is only one Bridegroom—Christ Himself. My contention is that what is true of the whole body of Christ (we are His bride) is also true of the individuals that make up that body—that we can individually experience a oneness with Him that is only dimly prefigured in human sexuality and which transcends it.

In Eph 5:32, in speaking of a man and woman becoming one flesh, Paul says:

This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the Church.

In this verse, Paul delivers the coup de grâce, the final brilliant stroke and focal point of the epistle, whose thematic roots go all the way back to the first chapter. Like a swordsman making a final flourish before dispatching his foe, Paul shockingly and brilliantly rips the veil that had hidden the answer to the mystery of the supreme purpose and end for God having saved us, as well as the mysteries behind God having made us male and female, sexual beings, called into faithful, monogamous, heterosexual relationships that were to personify the virtue of sacrificial love.

This is the overarching theme and teaching of the Book of Ephesians—the great and high calling of the believer, the primary reason for creating and redeeming mankind.

He wants to marry us!

He wants us to be His lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward and forever more. And in the Upper Room, with a towel wrapped around Him and a basin of water in front of Him, God incarnate knelt down to propose marriage. And what God hath brought together, let no one put asunder!

Throughout the ages, many Christian leaders have understood from Genesis and Ephesians that there is both a corporate and individual "mystical marriage" between Christ and believers. In fact, many believers have claimed to have had a direct experience of just such a reality through dreams and visions.

And so we see why Satan is so intent in defacing and destroying human sexuality and marriage. He is trying to mock God. He is trying to mar the very image of God expressed on this earth through the marital bond, sexual and otherwise. He is trying to rob God of His deepest and most passionate intention—that of marital union with man—because if he can destroy the beauty of the earthly bond, he can destroy in us any desire for the heavenly bond.

You and I, and every believer, were created to live in marital union with God, both now and in the age to come. Everything about a healthy marital union on this earthly plane has been designed by God to be a reflection of the interaction that we are meant to have with God Himself:

- the covenant that is struck to bind us together eternally;
- the signs and symbols of that covenant that are a public declaration of that bond;
- the keeping pure of oneself for the other;
- the wedding party, with a host of invited guests looking on, rejoicing in the display of our mutual love and affection;
- intimate moments of sharing our deepest self with the other, resulting in new life being born and a oneness of body, soul and spirit;
- over time, the development of a oneness of heart that produces a unity of thinking, and even, appearance (cf Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; 1 Jn 3:2—"when He appears, we shall be like Him").
- The parallels are endless.

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