



The Sexual-Spiritual Union of a Man and Woman

A good marriage is a mystery on many different levels.

by Rob Jackson

Marriages suffer from many wounds: power struggles, abusive situations, emotional distance, selfishness, immaturity, and addictions are some of the more easily identifiable aspects of a wounded relationship. Many marriages, however (even the seemingly healthy ones), often suffer from something far less easily recognized: a profound ignorance of the very nature of marriage itself. That is, couples understand neither what marriage truly is nor what it represents eternally. Without this deeper, intrinsic understanding of the marital union, these relationships labor under low standards and mistaken expectations.

A good marriage is a mystery on many different levels. The Apostle Paul writes of the profound nature of marriage in Ephesians 5. In verse 32, Paul wraps up his treatment of marriage by writing, *"This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church."*

What he means to tell us about this profound mystery is that our marriages are icons of the sacred union between Christ and the church.

This truly is a mystery and you might be having a hard time comprehending what it means. For starters, Paul's analogy is a means of teaching men how to be a type of Christ and women how to be a type of the Church. Husbands are taught by the Greatest Lover how to live sacrificially toward their wives. Wives are inspired by God's love to yield themselves in safety, treasured by both the One they await and the one who holds them in this life.

As we anticipate Christ's return – the marriage that will end all marriages – the spiritual romance between Christ and the Church is our best source of inspiration for a great marriage here.

Here's an especially comforting aspect of this truth. Even though our earthly marriage ends when death parts us, since we are also brother and sister, our spiritual union will not only continue in heaven, but will be perfect and complete.

But this idea also changes how we look at the here and now. The next time you're frustrated with your spouse, ask yourself, "Am I more focused with our temporal (earthly) marriage or our forever relationship?" How would things change if you were treating each other like a brother or sister in Christ instead of "the old ball and chain?" That may be a humorous stereotype, but it also begs the question: "Could or should things be different between me and my spouse?"

Let's look at what this marriage analogy means on every level. Each of us – male and female – are created with a trinity of our own—like our Creator. Our trinity consists of three levels: body, mind, and spirit. Our relationship to Christ informs each level, making us not only more like Him, but more like the spouse we were created to be. Of course, a damaged or distant relationship with Jesus also informs how each of these aspects operates.

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Often the physical part of us, including our behaviors, is the place we start our evaluation for the simple reason that it's the part that "shows." Like an iceberg with most of its bulk underwater, the tip is the part that first tells us it's there. This physical part, our body, is what Christ called His temple. The physical union of our bodies was planned to be a picture of the joy we will have when finally joined with Christ at his return, our spiritual marriage. This is not to say our union with Christ will be sexual, but that our earthly expressions of sexuality in marriage are the closest approximation to the unity, joy, and pleasurable fulfillment we will experience in heaven.

But, other, immediate applications include being a good steward of our temple as an act of gratitude and obedience. This spiritual/physical discipline will certainly build the enjoyment of our sexual relationship with our spouse.

Now let's dive underwater and look at the bigger parts of us we can't see. Our minds are constantly thinking, feeling,

analyzing information, and experiencing deep emotions. Christ says to renew our minds, which is a big process, constantly taking place as new and old thoughts and feelings collide and come to the surface.

When two people are tending to this chore in their own minds, it can be the difference between a marriage that thrives and one that flounders. Specific to our sexual union, two renewed minds lead to thoughtful, sensitive lovers, who are more likely to find sexual fulfillment rather than just going through the motions.

If we really get down to the unseen bulk of who we are we find the spirit. Even now, this part of our being is most like God. Here is our core, the very essence of who we are and who we're becoming. This part influences and directs our minds and bodies. How much more, then, do we need to nurture and maintain ourselves at this level than any other? And how much better lovers will we be if our spirits make us pure, loving, and trustworthy? These qualities would bless our sexual union at the deepest level possible.

Most people reading this article likely haven't ever given thought of their marriages (or future marriages) as a model of the inner love of the Trinity. Words like faithfulness, sacrifice, and service take on a new and powerful meaning in our relationships when we begin to realize this is precisely how God loves us.

Despite any past mistakes or wounds, our marriages have the potential to become what they were intended to be. Jumpstarting this transformation process requires realizing what we were intended to experience and then reforming where we have failed to match up. The Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes provides a timeless picture of marriage. Here we see two designed to function as one – with the help of God working behind it all.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. – Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

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