

### The Vision of Paul for Marriage – Ephesians 5

Okay, here's the scenario. You go to the doctor complaining about not feeling well. You explain that you know you don't eat right. You never get any exercise. You smoke, drink and eat mainly candy at every meal but you don't know why you don't feel good. So, the doctor runs some tests but he doesn't want to make you feel bad for your poor dietary choices, so he tells you that everything is just fine. He says you're healthy and you can just go home and continue doing what you have been doing. How would you feel about that?

Suppose you go to your lawyer and ask him about this letter you got from the Wise County Sheriff saying there is a warrant out for your arrest. He looks at it and does some research but he doesn't want you to be embarrassed about your legal problems so he comes back to you and tells you that it's all a mistake. Don't worry about it. They sent that letter to the wrong person. Everything is fine. How would you feel about that?

Lastly, you go see your bookkeeper. You tell him that your credit card got declined at the store and so you ask him about your finances. How are your investments doing? How much are you worth financially? Well, he pulls up your account on his computer and you are broke. Broke like a Chinese kids' toy broke. But he likes you and doesn't want you to feel bad so he tells you that you are a millionaire and you should just use another credit card. How would you feel about that?

You would be mad, wouldn't you? You would be mad because you want to know the truth about important things even if it hurts. You trust your doctor, lawyer and your bookkeeper to tell you that truth. Okay, so maybe you don't really trust your lawyer but you still expect the truth from him, right? What you do with that truth is up to you but you don't want to be misled about things that are so important. What about your relationships with the people that you love the most? Do you want to know the truth when it comes to marriage? Do you want to know the truth when it comes to your family? Of course you do. You want to know the truth even if it hurts. The question is, where do you find that truth?

Winston Churchill once said, *“Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing happened.”* Well, I don't want to just stumble over truth and run off from it. I want to know it, live, learn it and roll around in it. I want to envelope myself in truth. I may not always live like it, but I want to know what it is and in all my 50-something years, I have never found the Bible to be anything but truth. In fact, I have literally bet my life, in this world and the next, that the Bible is truth. My life, my job and my eternity are based on my belief that the Bible and every word in it are infallible and inerrant truth from the Old Testament into the New Testament and into my life and yours. And if it is not, then like Paul said, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:19)

So, let's turn to the book of Ephesians and see what God has to say about marriage through the Apostle Paul. I hear people complain about their marriage pretty often and way too often I also hear them say, *“Yes, I know what the Bible says but...”* and then they continue that sentence with, *“I feel”* or *“I think”* and it drives me crazy. Do you want to feel good or do you want to know the truth? Do you want to go by what you think or what the Bible says is truth? **Ephesians 5:22-33** can be hard for some people to swallow but in this passage, we see the vision that God gave to the Apostle Paul for marriage. And while it is true for marriage, it also applies to our church and to our relationship with the Lord. Let's read it.

*Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the LORD. 23For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the*

*church and gave himself up for her 26to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church- 30for we are members of his body. 31"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32This is a profound mystery-but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

The speaker at the local woman's club was lecturing on marriage and she asked the audience how many women wanted to "mother" their husbands. One member in the back row raised her hand. *"You do want to mother your husband?"* the speaker asked. *"Mother?"* the woman echoed. ***"I thought you said smother."*** Reader's Digest, October, 1993. I understand, ladies, that sometimes you may feel this way and some of you might want to smother me just for reading this passage but I want to know what God says about marriage. I want to know what it is and what it isn't and how to make it better and how to make it worse.

According to the website **divorcerate.com** the divorce rate in the United States today is somewhere between 40-50 percent. The cause, according to said website, is because of certain problems like incompatibility between couples, infidelity issues, lack of trust and understanding, and financial pressures. Well, duh! But every marriage is going to have those kinds of stressors so how does it help when the woman submits to the man and the man loves the woman like this passage says? Well, Paul compares it to the church submitting to Christ and how Christ loves the church. How does the church submit to Christ? The word "submit" literally means to voluntarily place oneself under another. It is voluntarily yielding in love. We, as the church, submit to Jesus when we yield to His desires but His desires are for our good. That is exactly what a good marriage has.

Think back to what that website said were the causes of most divorces: incompatibility between couples, infidelity issues, lack of trust and understanding, and financial pressures. Almost all that goes away with biblical submission, love and respect. Financial pressure may be a little different than the others but there is financial pressure in almost every marriage, rich or poor. There are lots of dead-broke happily married couples and more than most wealthy couples get divorced, so money is no guarantee of marital success at all. In fact, the main reason a marriage fails, even a Christian marriage, is because one or both parties fails to submit to Christ. Submission doesn't mean slavery and notice that Paul says that a woman is to submit to her husband. He doesn't say she submits to all men or any other man. Only her husband. She's not inferior to the man. She knows he loves her and wants the best for her so she chooses to allow him to make that choice.

It's a tired old illustration but it's still a good one that presents a growing and healthy marriage as a triangle with the man on one side and the woman on the other with God at the top and the closer each person gets to God, the closer they get to each other. That's what a good marriage is; each person considering the needs of the other as they grow in their love and submission to Jesus. Now, lots of people who are not Christians have successful marriages and that's great. I'm not saying that only Christians can do that; of course not. But there is a spiritual aspect to marriage that can't, or at least shouldn't, be overlooked.

I visited the Wise County Jail a while back and I started talking with a group of about 7-8 guys and I asked them what they were thankful for and several, maybe most, said they were thankful for their families including their baby-mamas. They're obviously talking about the women with whom they have babies but are not their wives. They also went on to talk about the difficulties they had in these relationships. I hadn't planned on it but I felt led to say something about how they shouldn't expect God to bless a sexual union between people who weren't married. Marriage is difficult enough when you do everything right. You sure don't want to start off living in

sin. Well, that didn't make me very popular with most of those guys and I doubt that this sermon will raise my approval rating with a lot of people. But I want to see, not only what makes a good marriage, like love, respect and submission, but also what marriage is and is not.

One of those guys in jail asked me what I thought marriage was because he said that in the eyes of the state, he was married. They never had a wedding but that's just a piece of paper and a ceremony. He was common-law married and he thought that was good enough and I thought he had a great question. I did some research and this is what the state of Texas says about common-law marriage. To have a common-law marriage in Texas, the couple must: 1) Agree to be married, 2) Live together in Texas as husband and wife, and 3) Tell other people that they are married. (<http://guides.sll.texas.gov/common-law-marriage>) That's it. There is no time frame involved. Just shack up and call yourself married. Easy peasey. But that leaves out the spiritual aspect that I was talking about and if this life is only physical and the spiritual doesn't matter then let's all live with whoever looks good or feels good and go on with life and if it doesn't work then we'll just get a divorce and go find somebody else that looks or feels good. Right? I mean, what could go wrong? But if the spiritual does matter and if you want to obey God and please God and be blessed by God then you have to know what He says. And God says in the Bible that living together in a sexual relationship outside of marriage is fornication. **1 Corinthians 7:2** says, *"to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband."*

Now, a wedding looks different to different cultures and times but in Christian culture a wedding always involves a man and a woman standing before God and their peers and declaring their love and fidelity to each other for as long as they live. Adam even stood before God and although he had no peers he proclaimed to the world and especially to God that this woman was now bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. (Genesis 2) Jesus commented on this passage when the Jewish leaders brought up the topic of divorce: *"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate"* (Mark 10:6–9). **Hebrews 13:4** says, *"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."*

Now, that brings up another issue that is not going to make me popular but I have to bring it out. If you want your marriage to be blessed by God then that marriage must involve one man and one woman. Everything else is sexual immorality. Now, I know this is going to keep me from ever being invited onto the Ellen Show and Oprah is going to hear about this and she'll never call me to be on her show. But seriously, much worse is the fact that I have gay and lesbian friends and family that might not like this and might just assume that because I sin differently than they do that I think I'm better than they are or that I don't love them. I promise nothing could be further from the truth. This isn't Todd's idea. It's God's. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, homosexuality is called a perversion. **Leviticus 18:22** says, *"Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable."* **Romans 1** says, *"Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie. 26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion."*

Some versions translate that with slightly different words but whatever version you use, you can't seriously argue that the Bible says homosexuality is anything but sinful and sin always puts a barrier between us and God. We all sin. We all know that and while every sin is an affront to Holy God, sexual sin is worse in its consequences. **1 Corinthians 6:18** says, *"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but*

*whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.*” Now, the comeback I hear most often when it comes to homosexuality is that “*Well, God made me this way. I didn’t choose this lifestyle*” and the “nature vs. nurture” debate rages on. There are libraries full of books that “prove” one way or the other and I’m not smart enough to even give an opinion. I do know that God hates sin and **Romans 1** clearly teaches that because these persons “*worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator*” and “*changed the truth of God into a lie*” God “gave them up to homosexuality” which is described as “shameful lusts”. Further, **Romans 1** clearly teaches that homosexuality is “against nature,” which means that this orientation is foreign to man’s nature, that is, it is NOT INSTILLED BY GOD.

But let’s just say for a minute that God did predispose a person to that kind of behavior. Even that is not a good enough reason to sin. For me personally, I know for a fact that I am heterosexual. No doubts there. However, I choose not to pursue an active sexual lifestyle just because God made me this way. I’m not married and so I make the choice to live celibate. Don’t tell me that God made you with anger issues and so you are angry. Don’t say that God made you to have forgiveness problems and so you can’t forgive and don’t say that God made you gay so being gay is not a sin. All sin is a choice and you can choose to do it or not to do it. **1 Corinthians 10:13** says, “*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*” That includes anger, unforgiveness, lust, theft, greed, gossip, homosexuality and every other sin. The good news is that **1 John 1:9** says, “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*” That includes anger, unforgiveness, lust, theft, greed, gossip, homosexuality and every other sin as well.

As I wrap things up here this morning, I hope you will hear me as I speak from my heart. Obviously, I am no expert on marriage and so I have tried real hard to keep my opinions and my advice and my thoughts out of this. Notice that I have purposefully not tried to be funny or have dramatic illustrations but instead, I have just cited scripture. I really do have friends and family that I dearly love who struggle with these biblical concepts about what marriage is and what it is not. I only, only, only want to speak truth even if it hurts me or the people I’m speaking to and this does hurt. I know it has and it would be a lot easier on me if I could just preach a prosperity Gospel and about how God is love and you’re ok and I’m ok and then we would probably have more people come to this church and we would leave feeling all warm and fuzzy but, as a pastor, I am called to preach the whole counsel of God, the whole will of God as it says in **Acts 20:27**. You expect the whole truth from your doctor, your lawyer and your bookkeeper so you should expect it from your pastor. To have a marriage blessed by God we have to do it according to His plan and sometimes that is hard but the good news is that we can have forgiveness and we can start over.

Maybe you need to start over in a whole new way by asking God to forgive you of your sins, all of them, and to repent of those sins – to turn away from them - asking Him to be Lord of your life. This life is hard for everybody but with a relationship with Jesus, we can have peace and joy in life and we can have happy, fulfilling marriage and abundant lives but we also get eternity in Heaven with Him. Do you want that? Of course you do. It’s not always easy but it is simple. Accept Him. Believe in Him as your Savior and confess that with your mouth and you can have it. Do it today. **Invitation / Prayer**

So, here’s the takeaway. When it comes to biblical marriage, living together before marriage or homosexuality, when you are talking with friends or family, I would encourage you not to give your opinion but instead to cite scripture. A biblical marriage relationship is found in **Ephesians 5:22-33**. God speaks to sex outside of marriage in lots of places but **Mark 10:6-9** and **Hebrews 13:4** are very clear. For homosexuality, almost all **Romans 1** is hard to defend. If somebody says, “*I know what the Bible says but...*” then just know that they are just giving their opinion and your opinion is as good as theirs. Lastly, and foremost, speak the truth but speak it in love. We are all sinners.