

How to Make Your Marriage Work 3

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Key Scripture

Ephesians 5:32-33 (ESV) "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

Sermon in One Sentence

Thriving Christian marriages are built upon a profound understanding of Christ's love for the church and demonstrated through a husband's sacrificial love and a wife's reverent respect.

Introduction

The statistics are sobering. Even among those who profess faith, divorce rates hover at disquieting levels, often mirroring the broader culture. Many couples enter marriage with high hopes, only to find the daily grind, unmet expectations, and unforeseen challenges chipping away at their initial joy. Is it possible to not just *survive* marriage, but to truly *thrive*? Can we move beyond merely "making it work" to actually experiencing profound intimacy and lasting joy?

Marriage, as God designed it, is meant to be a showcase of something far greater than just a social contract or a romantic partnership. It is a divine metaphor, a living parable, meant to reflect the very heart of God's relationship with His people. When our marriages flounder, not only do we experience personal pain, but we also diminish this powerful Gospel witness to a watching world.

Today, we continue our series on "How to Make Your Marriage Work," delving deeper into the profound truths of God's Word that offer not just advice, but the very blueprint for marital success, rooted in the gospel. Our passage today in Ephesians unveils the deep mystery hidden within the ordinary act of two people becoming one flesh.

Historical & Biblical Context

The Epistle to the Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul, most likely during his imprisonment in Rome, around A.D. 60-62. It was addressed to the church in Ephesus, a significant city in Asia Minor known for its diverse religious practices and temple dedicated to Artemis (Diana). Paul's primary purpose in writing was to establish believers in their identity in Christ (chapters 1-3) and to call them to walk worthy of that calling (chapters 4-6). This section on marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33) comes within the larger context of practical instructions for Christian living, urging believers to "walk in love, as Christ loved us" (5:2).

The Ephesian letter, particularly this passage, is revolutionary. In a Greco-Roman world where women often had diminished status and marriages were primarily economic or social arrangements, Paul elevates marriage to a spiritual institution. He doesn't just offer tips for domestic tranquility; he frames the

husband-wife relationship as a profound mystery, designed to image the unshakeable bond between Christ and His church. Understanding this cosmic dimension transforms ordinary marital duties into sacred acts of worship and witness.

Main Point I — The Profound Mystery: Marriage as a Gospel Portrait

Scripture: Ephesians 5:32 "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

Paul identifies marriage not merely as a human institution, but as a "profound mystery" (Greek: *mysterion*). In biblical terms, a mystery isn't something incomprehensible, but rather a truth previously hidden that has now been revealed by God. The mystery here is that human marriage is designed by God to be a living, breathing illustration of the covenant relationship between Christ and His church. This is not simply a nice analogy; it is the *purpose* behind marriage's design.

This main point reminds us that our individual marriages are not just about us. They have a transcendent purpose. When we understand that our marital union is meant to portray the Gospel, it elevates our commitment, deepens our resolve, and calls us to a higher standard. Every interaction, every sacrifice, every moment of patience or forgiveness becomes an opportunity to illustrate a divine truth. A strong Christian marriage, therefore, is not merely a testament to human effort, but a powerful, tangible witness to the glory of Christ and His unfailing love for His bride.

Main Point II — Husbands: Love with Christ-like Sacrifice

Scripture: Ephesians 5:33a "However, let each one of you love his wife as himself..."

Following the profound mystery, Paul immediately gives specific charges rooted in that truth. For husbands, the command is clear and demanding: "love his wife as himself." But as the verses preceding it (Ephesians 5:25-31) make abundantly clear, this is not just general affection. It's a love patterned after Christ's love for the church – a foundational, sacrificial, purifying, nurturing, and cherishing love. It's a love that gives, even unto death, and seeks the wife's holiness and flourishing above all else.

This Christ-like love means actively pursuing the well-being of one's wife, even when it's inconvenient, costly, or challenging. It manifests in selfless service, in tender care, in providing security, and in pursuing her spiritual and emotional growth. For a husband to truly love his wife as himself means he views her as an extension of himself, safeguarding her honor and welfare with the same tenacity he would his own. It challenges societal notions of masculinity and calls men to a leadership of humble, servant-hearted sacrifice, making the profound mystery visible in daily life.

Main Point III — Wives: Respect with Reverent Esteem

Scripture: Ephesians 5:33b "...and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

For wives, the divine instruction is equally crucial: "let the wife see that she respects her husband." The word used here for respect, *phobeomai*, carries the nuance of reverent awe or esteem, not fear in the modern sense. It is a recognition of the husband's position of headship (as established in verse 23) and a

corresponding honor and admiration for him. This does not mean blind submission or the suppression of her individuality; rather, it is an active choice to honor his leadership, affirm his value, and recognize his unique role within the marital covenant.

This commandment for wives is as counter-cultural today as the husband's command to sacrificial love was in Paul's day. True respect goes beyond mere surface-level politeness; it involves valuing his perspective, affirming his efforts, and showing honor for who he is and the role God has given him. When a wife genuinely respects her husband, it creates an environment where he feels affirmed, and it empowers him to more readily embrace his calling to sacrificial love. Both commands, love and respect, are inextricably linked to the Gospel portrait – a picture of Christ's perfect love and the church's reverent response.

Illustration

Consider the story of a couple, let's call them Mark and Sarah. They had been married for 15 years, both committed Christians, but their marriage felt stagnant. Mark struggled to initiate spiritual leadership, often feeling inadequate, and Sarah, in turn, found herself criticizing his passivity. One day, a pastor challenged them with Ephesians 5. Mark heard the call to sacrificial love not as a burden, but as an invitation to truly *give* himself, starting with active listening and praying *with* Sarah. Sarah, on her part, began to consciously express appreciation for Mark's attempts at provision and leadership, even when they weren't perfect. She chose to speak respectfully of him, both to him and to others. Over time, as Mark took more initiative in humble love, Sarah, feeling valued and secure, found it easier to offer genuine respect. Their marriage didn't become perfect overnight, but it moved from being a strained coexistence to a vibrant partnership, truly reflecting the grace and dynamic interaction between Christ and His church.

Practical Application

- 1. Husbands, Practice Daily Sacrificial Love:** This week, identify one specific need your wife has that you can meet through selfless action (e.g., take on a chore she usually does, listen without interruption for 15 minutes, pray for her aloud). Do this with no expectation of immediate return, aiming to cherish and nurture her as Christ cherishes His church.
- 2. Wives, Practice Daily Reverent Respect:** This week, identify one specific way you can affirm or honor your husband, either verbally or through an action (e.g., express gratitude for his hard work, praise a character quality you admire, ask for his counsel on an important matter). Actively guard against critical or disrespectful speech, focusing instead on building him up.
- 3. Study Ephesians 5:22-33 Together:** As a couple, dedicate time to read and discuss this passage together. Ask each other: "How does Christ's love for the church challenge me in my role?" and "How can our marriage better reflect the mystery of Christ and the church?"
- 4. Pray for Your Spouse's God-given Role:** Husbands, pray for God to empower your wife to respect you. Wives, pray for God to empower your husband to love you sacrificially. Actively pray for each other to fulfill the biblical mandates, trusting the Holy Spirit to work in your hearts.

5. Seek "One Flesh" Unity: Identify one area where you and your spouse can intentionally pursue greater unity this week, whether it's in decision-making, shared leisure, or spiritual growth. Remember, marriage is about two becoming one, mirroring the inseparable union of Christ and His body.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways does your understanding of "marriage as a profound mystery" (Christ and the Church) change your perspective on your own marriage or marriage in general?
2. Husbands, what is one tangible way you can demonstrate Christ-like sacrificial love to your wife this week, even when you don't feel like it?
3. Wives, what does "respecting your husband" practically look like in your daily interactions, especially when you disagree or feel frustrated?
4. How can a Christian couple's marriage serve as a powerful witness to the Gospel in their community and to unbelievers?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the sacred gift of marriage, a profound mystery designed to reflect the glorious union of Christ and His church. We pray for every husband here, that You would empower them to love their wives with a selfless, sacrificial love, just as Christ loved us. We pray for every wife, that You would enable them to honor and respect their husbands with a reverent esteem. May our marriages bear witness to Your saving grace and steadfast faithfulness, for Your glory alone. Amen.

Benediction

Now may the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace, as you go forth to live out the profound mystery of Christ and His church in your homes.