

## Recall & React – Walk in Wisdom (Part 3)

### Ephesians 5:15-6-9

I have no doubt that every person in this room was a consumer this week. What do I mean by that? You spent some time evaluating the purchasing options in front of you and deciding which item to buy using your resources based on which would serve your needs the most. I made a special trip to Sam's Club this week because they sell a 2 ½ pound bag of coffee beans for a very good price. It's the most bang for my buck as a consumer of coffee that I have been able to find.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with being a consumer and we have the freedom and ability to maximize our resources in our economy. But here's the danger. We live in a world dominated by consumerism so much so that we easily start to think of relationships in terms of investment and return. We evaluate friendships this way and even our churches this way. We can start to think that the church exists to provide a particular service to me and if it doesn't do it the way I want it to, then I will take my resources elsewhere.

There may be no area where this has been more damaging in our culture than the consumer driven perspective on marriage we now have. People enter into marriage now regarding it as a consumer relationship and the moment it stops giving me the return that my investment of resources demands, then it's not worth it. Most Christians would not consciously subscribe to this view of marriage, but we often exhibit it in daily life.

Rather than get our perspective of marriage shaped into this cultural mold, we have to fight to understand marriage as a covenant relationship and not a consumer one. What does that mean? A covenant relationship is a binding commitment to another person. Tim Keller says that in a consumer relationship the needs of the individual take priority over the needs of the relationship while in a covenant relationship the needs of the relationship take priority over the needs of the individual at any given moment.

The Bible is filled with covenant relationships between God and human beings. God commits to His people and moves heaven and earth to sustain the relationship, even sending His Son to die in order to redeem humanity. And of course, we spent last week talking about how marriage is modeled after God's

love for us demonstrated in Christ. This makes marriage a fundamentally covenant relationship and it's vital to grasp this for the health and well-being of our marriages. Turn with me back to Ephesians 5 and understand that the core of this passage is Paul's presentation of marriage as a covenant relationship based on Christ's covenant union with His bride, the church.

We started looking at Ephesians 5:22-33 last week and unfolding the ways in which human marriages mimic Christ's relationship with the church. We are calling these guidelines for walking in wisdom in your marriage and there are three of them.

**1. Wives, Follow Your Husbands Loving Leadership by Imitating the Church's Example (vv. 22-24)**

Now, I understand that I was very thin on specifics last week when it comes to the instructions of verses 22-24 and that was intentional. The Bible gives us these broad principles that we have to work out in daily life. The fact that these are broad principles doesn't give us the right to do whatever we want. In fact, it means we need to work extra hard at understanding and applying these principles to our own relationships.

Maybe this will help, in Genesis 2 when Adam looked around before God created Eve, he did not find a helper fit for him. That word helper describes Eve in her role as Adam's wife and it means a strong helper, a complement who supplies what is lacking in him. So, wives are to respond to the husband's leadership and shore up what is lacking in him to make the relationship successful and to make him successful. You offer the gift of submission to his leadership in order to benefit him. Of course, the husband initiates this by imitating Christ's loving leadership of the church and this is our second guideline.

**2. Husbands, Love Your Wives by Imitating Christ's Loving Sacrifice (vv. 25-27)**

Look with me at verses 25-27. As you view Christ's relationship with the church it's one of loving, intentional, sacrificial leadership. He knows what is best for His bride and pursues that at great personal cost.

Husbands, if you think of Christ's intentional, sacrificial leadership as the road we must travel on, there are ditches on either side of the road that most of us spend

most of our time in. On one side you have the dominant controlling husband who thinks everyone in the house exists for his pleasure and control. On the other side you have the passive husband who fails to initiate and fails to lead at all. He abdicates his responsibility to guide his wife and family and set the tone of loving sacrifice. He sort of glides through life and never even considers his responsibility before the Lord. I would say most guys fall into the second ditch. And since we often fail to lovingly exercise initiating sacrificial leadership we need to be shaped by our third guideline.

### **3. Husbands, Love Your Wives by Imitating Christ's Loving Union (vv. 28-33)**

You can see in this section that Paul follows the same pattern he did in verses 22-24. He begins with a command and then gives the model and foundation for that command in Christ and the church. Look again at verses 22-23 and now look at verses 28-29.

So, he begins with very clear instruction to husbands. They are to love their wives as their own bodies. What exactly is Paul getting out with this command? Well, it's not some cheesy cliché like "Happy Wife, Happy Life" which can often sound like telling someone, "If you will be nice to your wife your life will be easier." Which is an awful and patronizing thing to say.

Paul is also not telling husbands that the most important thing they can do is to love themselves. It's amazing how frequently I hear people say things like, "before you can love someone else you have to love yourself." The Bible nowhere tells us to love self. In fact, it constantly warns against self-love.

What Scripture does do is to assume a level of natural care and concern that you have for yourself. The whole love yourself idea goes well beyond what is being taught here. You naturally care for your body. You and I don't like to be uncomfortable. Paul's point here is that love, care, and concern for your wife should come as naturally as it does for your own body. In fact, when you love your wife you are in reality taking care of your own body because you are in fact, one body. Look at the last phrase of verse 28. This is true because of what follows in verses 29-30.

These verses provide the theological backdrop for the one flesh union of husband and wife. Husbands love and cherish their wives, not to manipulate and control,

but because of the example set by Christ and the church and the reality of the one-flesh union. Think for a second about the example set by Christ's love for the church and the union between the church and Christ. Verse 30 says that we are members of His body.

The entire book of Ephesians has presented this doctrine of the union of believers to Christ. Over and over again we read that we are "In Him" or "In Christ." In fact, all the benefits of salvation come to us because we have been joined to Jesus. In a very real sense, what has happened to Him happens to us. Listen again to Ephesians 1:22-23. We have been so united to Him that we, as the church, are considered His body, His fullness.

So, having stated that Christ and the church are one body in verse 30, Paul does something very interesting here. He wants to give scriptural justification for that view, and he does it by going to a most interesting place. He quotes Genesis 2:24 to us to prove that Christ and the church are of one body. Look at verse 31. Well, it's fairly obvious if you go back and read Genesis 2 that that passage is talking about Adam and Eve and the very first human marriage. It is talking about Adam and Eve, but Paul uses this passage to help us understand that human marriage is not the foundation here. The real foundation on which human marriage is built is Christ's love for His people.

Paul makes this clear in verse 32. Now, we have to be clear about what the mystery is here. Throughout Ephesians the "mystery" has been the fulfillment of God's plans in Jesus Christ in the creation of the church. Listen to Ephesian 3:6. So, in Ephesians 5:32 Paul is defining the mystery as the relationship between Christ and the church as His body and how that relationship is reflected in human marriage.

I've often had the privilege of speaking at weddings and it's a favorite part of pastoral ministry for me. Many times during those ceremonies I will tell the group gathered that this wedding and ultimately this marriage is a picture frame meant to draw attention to the main attraction, which is the beautiful artwork of Christ's love for His church. I think that's what Paul is getting at here. Even the original wedding ceremony of the first couple which was the creation of human marriage is about pointing to the mystery of Christ's union with His beloved bride.

So, by quoting Genesis 2:24 Paul is teaching us about the real purpose of marriage, to reflect Christ's love, and the true nature of marriage, it's a covenant union. Look at the language of verse 31, which is really Genesis 2:24. The husband and wife are joined together, the husband is to hold fast to his wife, the two become one flesh.

When Bethany and I got married in 2004 we did some pre-marital counseling with our pastor in South Carolina. I don't remember a ton from those meetings, which consisted of us going to his office and listening a lot. But, I think we both remember one image that he used that is very much based on the wording of Genesis 2:24 that Paul quotes here. He told us that getting married is being glued together. We are still individual people, but we are so joined together in every way that we operate as one. He gave us a warning that you cannot undo that union without significant pain and splintering because of the nature of the relationship.

That's exactly right. And that's exactly what Paul intends for us to understand about both our human marriages and the love and union between Christ and the church. We have been glued to Christ. Joined to Him in such a way that He loves us as His own body. He sacrifices for us and exercises His sovereign authority over the entire universe for our good. And, because our union with Him is a covenant union, He will never let us go. He will never break that relationship.

And reflecting on that relationship should cause us to reflect on our own marriages. The theology of Christ's covenantal love and the deep mystery of it is not abstract and impractical. In fact, the deeper you go into it the more you realize just how functional it is in daily life. Look at verse 33.

Notice the language here. "Let each of you." These commands are given to the individual husband and the individual wife sitting in the church in Ephesus listening to this letter read out loud. We each have a responsibility to work out these truths in our own marriages. What do husbands do? Recognize the covenant union you have with your wife and love her as your own body. Nourish and cherish her. Do what is best for her. Cultivate her and make her successful. Be kind and gentle, be strong and intentional.

Wives, recognize the way your relationship with your husband models the church's relationship with Christ. Have a respect and even reverence for his

responsibility to lead sacrificially. Give him the gift of making him successful in his task. Be the strong helper that complements where he is weak.

And together, you will proclaim to the world the difference Christ has made in your marriage and you can be that picture frame that points to his covenantal love. Let's Pray.