

Ephesians – Week 15 – A Great Mystery – Bible Study Helps

Title: A Great Mystery

Sermon Summary:

This sermon from Ephesians 5:15-33 reveals that Christian marriage is fundamentally designed to be a living illustration of the gospel and Christ's relationship with the church. It emphasizes that the passage is ultimately about Jesus Christ rather than merely about marital roles. Every Christian must first submit to Christ in everything before they can fulfill their marital responsibilities. For wives, submission to their husbands mirrors the church's submission to Christ. For husbands, loving their wives requires the same sacrificial, sanctifying, and sustaining love that Christ demonstrates toward His church. The "great mystery" revealed is that from Genesis onward, marriage was always intended to point people to the reality of Christ's union with His bride, the church. The sermon challenges believers to examine their relationship with Jesus Christ first, recognizing that Spirit-filled living is essential to fulfilling God's design for marriage. The ultimate question is not what kind of spouse one should be, but what kind of Christian one is to our husband, Jesus Christ.

Key Points:

- Christians must submit to Jesus Christ in everything before addressing marital responsibilities
- Spirit-filled living provides the foundation for biblical marriage relationships
- The husband's headship mirrors Christ's headship over the church, emphasizing loving leadership rather than domination
- Wives are called to submit to their husbands "as unto the Lord," making it an act of worship to God
- Submission means willingly placing oneself under authority and trusting God's design and order
- Husbands must love their wives as Christ loved the church through three expressions: sacrificial love (giving himself), sanctifying love (cleansing with the Word), and sustaining love (nourishing and cherishing)
- The standard for husbands is not comparison with other men but with how Christ loves them
- Marriage from Genesis to Revelation was designed to illustrate the gospel and point people to Christ
- The "great mystery" is that the one-flesh union in marriage prefigures Christ's union with His church
- Every Christian marriage should illustrate Christ's authority, sacrifice, love, and faithfulness for the world to see
- Rebellion against God's order in marriage follows Satan's pattern of rejecting divine authority
- The greatest submission issue is not marital but each believer's submission to Jesus Christ
- Children should learn about Christ and the church by observing their parents' marriage

Scripture Reference:

- Primary: Ephesians 5:15-33
- Supporting: Genesis 2:21-24, Colossians 3:18, 1 Corinthians 11:1-3, John 15:13, Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:19, Matthew and Mark (Jesus quoting Genesis on marriage)

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Stories:

- Marriage counseling example where both spouses say "you don't understand" about each other's failures, with the pastor redirecting them to how Christ treats them despite their unworthiness
- Illustration of families gathering where relatives should observe a Christian marriage and think "that's not like the world" because it reflects Christ and the church
- Personal testimony about watching God work in the church, rejoicing that despite personal flaws, God still uses imperfect people in His plan

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Discipleship Questions

How does viewing your marriage as an illustration of Christ and the church change the way you approach daily conflicts and decisions with your spouse?

In what specific areas of your life are you finding it most difficult to submit to Jesus Christ as your head, and what is preventing full surrender?

If someone observed your marriage for one month, what would they learn about Jesus Christ's relationship with the church based on what they saw?

How does understanding that submission to a husband is ultimately an act of worship to God transform the meaning and motivation behind biblical submission?

What does it practically look like for a husband to love his wife with the same sacrificial, sanctifying, and sustaining love that Christ demonstrates toward the church?

How might our struggles in marriage relationships reveal deeper issues with our submission to and relationship with Jesus Christ himself?

In what ways does the mystery revealed in Ephesians 5, that marriage points to Christ and the church from Genesis onward, elevate the purpose and calling of Christian marriage?

How can single Christians apply the principles of submission to Christ and Spirit-filled living from this passage to honor God in their current season of life?

What would change in your daily life if you truly lived with the mindset that Jesus Christ loves you anyway, despite all your flaws and failures?

How does recognizing that the greatest submission issue is not marital but between you and Jesus Christ shift your perspective on obedience and spiritual growth?

Small Group Guide: A Great Mystery

Ephesians 5:15-33

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Icebreaker Question: What's one example you've seen (in person or in media) of a marriage that made you think, "That's what love looks like"? What stood out to you about it?

Key Sermon Points

1. **Christians must submit to Jesus Christ in everything** - Our primary relationship is with Christ as our head
 2. **Jesus Christ's love is the foundation** - Christ's sacrificial love sets the standard for all relationships
 3. **Marriage is a living illustration of the Gospel** - It points to Jesus Christ and His bride – the church
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Discussion Questions

Section 1: Submission to Christ (20 minutes)

Read Ephesians 5:21-24

1. The sermon emphasized that "the greatest submission issue in the room is not marital—it's you and me to Jesus Christ." Why is our submission to Christ the foundation for everything else?
 2. What does it practically look like to submit to Jesus Christ "in everything"? What areas of your life are hardest to surrender to Him?
 3. The sermon stated that Spirit-filled living is essential for biblical marriage. How does walking in the Spirit (vs. 18-21) prepare us for the responsibilities God gives us in relationships?
 4. **Personal Reflection:** On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your current level of submission to Christ as your head? What's one area where you sense God calling you to greater surrender?
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Section 2: Christ's Sacrificial Love (20 minutes)

Read Ephesians 5:25-30

5. The sermon said, "Love is not emotion. Love is not lust. Love is sacrifice." How does our culture's definition of love differ from the biblical definition presented in this passage?
6. Three aspects of Christ's love were highlighted:
 - **Sacrificial** (gave Himself)
 - **Sanctifying** (cleanses with the Word)
 - **Sustaining** (nourishes and cherishes)

Which of these three do you find most challenging to demonstrate in your relationships? Why?

7. For husbands: What would it look like this week to love your wife "as Christ loved the church"? What specific sacrifice might God be calling you to make?
 8. For everyone: How has Jesus Christ demonstrated these three types of love in your own life? Share a specific example.
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Section 3: A Great Mystery (15 minutes)

Read Ephesians 5:31-33 and Genesis 2:24

9. The sermon revealed that marriage from the very beginning (Adam and Eve) was designed to point to Christ and the church. How does this change your perspective on marriage—whether your own or marriage in general?
 10. The sermon asked: "If somebody watched your marriage for one month, what would they learn about Jesus Christ from what they saw and heard?" How would you honestly answer this question?
 11. For singles: How does understanding marriage as an illustration of Christ and the church affect how you think about potential future marriage or how you support married couples around you?
 12. The sermon stated, "The question is not what makes you happy in marriage, but how does your marriage glorify Jesus Christ?" Why is this such a radical shift from how most people (even Christians) approach marriage?
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Practical Application (15 minutes)

For Everyone:

This Week's Challenge: Evaluate your relationship with Jesus Christ

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- Spend time in prayer asking: "Lord, what areas of my life am I not submitting to You?"
- Write down specific areas where you need to surrender control
- Confess any rebellion and ask for His help to walk in obedience

Scripture Memory: Ephesians 5:25 - "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."

For Married Couples:

Husband's Action Steps:

1. Ask your wife: "What's one way I can better demonstrate Christ's love to you this week?"
2. Identify one area where you can sacrifice your preferences for her needs
3. Pray daily for your wife's spiritual growth

Wife's Action Steps:

1. Examine your heart: Are there areas where you're resisting your husband's leadership (assuming it's biblical)?
2. Ask yourself: "How can my response to my husband this week demonstrate how the church should respond to Christ?"
3. Pray daily for your husband's leadership and spiritual strength

Together:

- Have an honest conversation: "Does our marriage point others to Jesus Christ? How can we better reflect the Gospel?"
 - Pray together about one specific way your marriage can be a clearer illustration of Christ and the church
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For Singles:

1. How can you better submit to Christ as your "husband" this week?
 2. What standards should you have for a future spouse based on this passage?
 3. How can you encourage and support married couples in your life to reflect Christ and the church?
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Closing Reflection (10 minutes)

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Key Takeaway: Marriage is not ultimately about personal happiness—it's about bringing glory to Jesus Christ. Whether married or single, our primary relationship is with Jesus Christ, and all other relationships should flow from our submission to Him.

Final Questions:

- What was the most challenging truth from this sermon for you personally?
 - What's one specific thing God is calling you to change based on what we've discussed?
 - How can this group pray for you this week?
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Closing Prayer

Pray together, focusing on:

- Gratitude for Christ's sacrificial love for us
 - Confession of areas where we've failed to submit to Him or love like Him
 - Requests for grace to live out these biblical principles
 - Specific needs shared by group members
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Additional Resources for Deeper Study

- **Related Passages:** 1 Corinthians 11:3; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Peter 3:1-7; Genesis 2:18-25
 - **For Reflection:** Read through Ephesians 5:15-33 each day this week, asking God to show you one new insight each time
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Leader Notes

- **Be Sensitive:** This topic can be difficult for those in challenging marriages, those who are divorced, or singles who long to be married. Create a safe space for honest discussion.
- **Stay Balanced:** While the passage addresses husbands and wives specifically, keep bringing it back to everyone's relationship with Christ.
- **Avoid Extremes:** Don't let discussion devolve into "wife-bashing" or "husband-bashing." The focus should be on personal responsibility before God.
- **Gospel-Centered:** Continually point back to Christ's love, grace, and sacrifice as both our example and our empowerment.

5-Day Devotional: Living as Christ's Bride

Day 1: Surrendered to Our Head

Reading: Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18

Devotional: Before God addresses marriage roles, He establishes a foundational truth: Christ is the head of the church. Every believer—regardless of marital status—must first answer this question: Am I fully surrendered to Jesus Christ in everything? Our submission to Him isn't selective or conditional. Just as the body follows the head, we must follow wherever Christ leads. This isn't about losing value but about trusting God's perfect order. When we struggle with earthly relationships, the real issue often lies in our relationship with our heavenly Husband. Today, examine your life honestly. Are there areas where you're resisting His leadership? True freedom comes when we place ourselves completely under His loving authority. He has never failed you and never will.

Day 2: Loved Beyond Measure

Reading: Ephesians 5:25-27; Romans 5:6-8

Devotional: Christ's love for His church is the standard for all relationships. He didn't wait until we deserved His love—He gave Himself while we were still sinners. This sacrificial, selfless love cost Him everything. He continually sanctifies, cleanses, nourishes, and cherishes us. When you feel unloved or unworthy, remember: your Husband in heaven thinks you're worth dying for. He's preparing you as His glorious bride, removing every spot and wrinkle. The question isn't whether others love you perfectly, but whether you're receiving Christ's perfect love. Let His love fill the empty places in your heart. When you grasp how deeply He loves you—in spite of your flaws and failures—you'll find the power to love others sacrificially. His love for you is the foundation of everything.

Day 3: A Living Illustration

Reading: Ephesians 5:28-32; Genesis 2:21-24

Devotional: Marriage is more than a human relationship—it's a divine mystery revealing Christ and His church. From the very beginning, when God created Eve from Adam's rib, He was painting a picture of the gospel. We are bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh, forever joined to our risen Savior. Every Christian marriage should be a living sermon, showing the world Christ's authority, sacrifice, and faithfulness. But this mystery applies to all believers: you are already married to Jesus Christ. He has left His Father's house for you, joined Himself to you, and made you one with Him. You cannot be separated from Him. Does your life point others to this glorious relationship? Let people watch your devotion to Christ and say, "I want what they have."

Day 4: Spirit-Filled Relationships

Reading: Ephesians 5:15-21; Galatians 5:16-25

Devotional: God's design for relationships—especially marriage—is impossible to fulfill in the flesh. Walking in the Spirit isn't optional; it's essential. When we're filled with His Spirit, submission becomes worship, love becomes sacrifice, and relationships become testimonies. The greatest problem in marriages isn't communication or compatibility—it's two people living according to their flesh rather than the Spirit. Before addressing your spouse's failures, ask: Am I walking in the Spirit today? Am I speaking in psalms and spiritual songs? Am I giving thanks in everything? Am I submitting to others in the fear of God? Spirit-filled living produces the fruit necessary for godly relationships: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance. Empty yourself today. Confess your self-centeredness. Ask Him to fill you afresh with His Holy Spirit.

Day 5: You Love Me Anyway

Reading: Ephesians 5:33; 1 John 4:9-19

Devotional: The crown of thorns on Christ's head—that was your sin. The nails in His hands—your rebellion. The spear in His side—your betrayal. Yet He loves you anyway. This is the undeserved grace that should transform how we love others. When your spouse fails you, remember how often you fail Christ. When submission feels impossible, remember He submitted to death for you. When loving sacrificially seems too hard, remember He gave everything while you were still His enemy. Marriage begins not with finding the perfect person, but with understanding the perfect love Christ has for imperfect you. From Genesis to Revelation, from Eden's first marriage to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, God's story is about love that conquers all. Today, receive His love afresh. Then love others the same way—anyway.