MysteryOfMarriage.com

The Mystery of Marriage

Compiled 2025 by Henry H. Mitchell. The text below is not an exhaustive study of this topic. To be thorough, one would include the entire Bible! The word "church" throughout these notes is not intended to imply a formal group or four-walls congregation, but simply all who sincerely believe in Jesus.

The Great Mystery Revealed

Throughout all history, extreme intellectual, emotional, and cultural energy has been devoted to the agonies and ecstasies of love and marriage. In the late 1900s, Frank Sinatra sang that "Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage." Perry Como crooned, "Love makes the world go 'round." Roy Orbison mourned, "I can't help it if I cry, I remember that you said goodbye."

Twenty centuries ago, after giving instructions to married couples (below at left) in his letter to Ephesus, the apostle Paul revealed the previously-hidden mystery of marriage itself (below at right): the relationship of a husband and wife is like the relationship of Christ and his church.

Properly understood, a marriage should be a mirror and example of Christ and his church, and Christ and his church should be an instructive example to a marriage. Properly lived, marriage should greatly strengthen one's Jesus-connection, and one's Jesus-connection should greatly strengthen one's marriage. God created marriage in order to teach us how to relate to Him, and to each other.

(All scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.)

Ephesians 5:22-30 (also *Colossians* 3: 18-19) –	*Ephesians* 5:31-32 –
"Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church — for we are members of his body."	" 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh [quoting *Genesis* 2: 24].' **This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church**."

To some, Paul's instructions to husbands and wives may seem impossible or distasteful, but he was assuming that his audience:

First, had **recognized their sinful state**, the genetic curse we inherit due to our ancestors Adam and Eve's rebellion. (In *John* 8:44, Jesus shocked the very-religious Pharisees by telling them, "You belong to your father, the devil . . . .")

Second, had **corrected that curse through a new spiritual birth**. In *John* 3:3 Jesus explained to the Pharisee and ruling council member Nicodemus, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." Paul detailed in *Romans* 10:9-10, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved." John wrote (*1 John* 5:1), "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."

Third, had invited and were constantly receiving the **internal guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit**. (In *John* 14: 26 Jesus promised, ". . . the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." In *Luke* 24:49 and *Acts* 1:8, after his resurrection, Jesus instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.")

Without such a process of internal transformation, it is difficult for a husband to be sacrificially loving and worthy of respect, and it is difficult for a wife to give respect and be worthy of sacrificial love – especially under the dire circumstances that life often brings.

But when godly relationships are in place, the godly marriage-mirror becomes clear.

Instructions for Husbands and Wives

For husbands:	**See the parallel of Christ and his church:**
Ephesians 5: 25-33 (also *Colossians* 3: 19) – "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church — for we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh [quoting *Genesis* 2: 24].' This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."	*Ephesians* 5: 26-27 – ". . . Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." *Ephesians* 5: 29-30 – "After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body."

For wives:	**For all Christians:**
Ephesians 5:22-24 (also *Colossians* 3: 18) – "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." *Ephesians* 5:33 – "However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."	*Ephesians* 5:21 – "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." *Revelation* 17:14 – "They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and **faithful** followers."

To the married couple:	**To all Christians:**
Hebrews 13:4 – "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."	2 *Corinthians* 11:2-4 – "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough."

Marriage and Family: Tests for Christian Leadership

The principle of marriage as a picture of Christ and his church is applied in Biblical instructions for choosing church leaders.

Regarding overseers (**elders**, bishops):

1 Timothy 3:2-5 – "Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) "

Titus 1:6 – "An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient."

Regarding **deacons**: *1 Timothy 3:12* – "A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well." Regarding **deacons' wives**: *1 Timothy* 3:11 – "In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything."

Subsequent blocks below present a partial listing of further illustrative parallels between a marriage relationship (on the left), and the Christ-and-church relationship (on the right).

One-flesh Relationships Began with Pierced Sides

God pierced the first Adam's side to bring forth new-creation Eve and a one-flesh relationship with Adam. As the second Adam (*1 Corinthians* 15:45-49), Jesus's side was pierced in order to bring forth us as his new creations and one-flesh relationship with him. After a supernatural conception, Jesus had a natural human birth (of water and blood – amniotic fluid and placenta); we have access to a supernatural second birth through the water and blood of Jesus's pierced side.

Genesis 2:20-23 – "So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.' "	John 19:33-34 – "But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water." Isaiah 53:5 – "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." 1 John 5:1-6 – "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God . . . . everyone born of God overcomes the world. . . . Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood." Romans 8:29 – "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."

One-flesh Relationships Involve Leaving Parents

Marriage involves leaving the parental fold in order to form a new one-flesh union. Likewise, Jesus left his heavenly residence as the Son of God in order to be our servant, separated himself from God the Father in order to become our sacrifice, and as a result became the first of the new order: resurrected from death to form the eternal one-flesh relationship of Christ and his church.

Genesis 2:24 – "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." Matthew 19:5 – "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."	Philippians 2:5-7 – "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." Matthew 27:46 – "About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, '*Eli, Eli,lema sabachthani?'* (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?') – [quoting Psalm 22:1]." Colossians 1:18 – "And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."

One-flesh Unions Are Physical

Both the relationship with a spouse and the relationship with Christ involve physical surrender and expression.

With spouse:	**With Christ:**
1 Corinthians 7:3-5 – "The husband should fulfill his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband's needs. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife. Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won't be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control."	Romans 12:1-2 –"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

One-Flesh Unions are Permanent Commitments

Marriage is designed to be permanent and inseparable while we are alive in this world; our union with Christ is designed to be permanent and inseparable both in this world and the next. We must not seek security in any other relationships or sources.

With spouse:	**With Christ:**
Matthew 19:6 – "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."	Matthew 28:20 – "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." John 10:28-29 – "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." Hebrews 13:5 – "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you [quoting Deuteronomy 31:6].' "

Looking Forward

Christ will be united with his bride in a ceremony called the Marriage Feast of the Lamb – that is foreshadowed by our own wedding rituals here on earth. A description is found in Revelation 19, including the statement in verse 7, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. . . ."

In the Meantime . . .

Marriages here on earth usually do not terminate with both partners stepping simultaneously into Heaven. One goes ahead, the other stays behind. And when we do enter Heaven, life will be infinitely different from here, as Jesus pointed out (Matthew 22:30), "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven."

In early 2024 my dearly beloved Patricia entered Heaven suddenly and unexpectedly. I grieve deeply over the fact that she is not still here with me, or that I am not there with her. But Paul put this into perspective in Philippians 1:21-24: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."

In other words, we will experience great joy in Heaven, but in the meantime we are assigned great purpose – "fruitful labor" – here on Earth.

For those widows and widowers left behind, Paul provided insights. Some of those (see 1 Timothy 5) dealt with the church's responsibility, in the culture of that place and time, to provide an economic safety net for widows. Beyond the economic issues, here are some of Paul's further comments, in which he both clarified the morality issue of remarriage and stated his own opinion about that choice:

> Romans 7:1-3 – "Do you not know, brothers and sisters – for I am speaking to those who know the law – that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man."

> 1 Corinthians 7:39-40 – "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is – and I think that I too have the Spirit of God."

> 1 Corinthians 7:7-9 – "I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

> 1 Corinthians 7:32-34 – "I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs – how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world – how he can please his wife – and his interests are divided."