

Love Serves

Ephesians 5:22-33; February 17, 2019

Introduction:

Today is the third sermon in our “I am yours” relationships series.

- 1st sermon: Love Stays
 - Text: Hosea 1-3
 - Point: Love stays.
- 2nd sermon: Love Secures
 - Text: John 10:1-30
 - Point: I am yours and I will protect you.
- Today we are going to talk about how *Love Serves* and the **main point is really simple: “I am yours and I will serve you.”**

Before we jump in to unpacking this point and looking at our text today, let me tell you a little bit about my marriage. Leigh and I met our freshmen year in college. The first time we dated was our freshmen year. I was a complete dummy and broke up with her after a month saying, “I just want to be friends” (such a cop out). Graciously (and through God’s sovereign provision), she gave me a second chance our junior year. We both spent that summer serving with CRU in South Asia and it was on that summer mission project that we started dating again. I guess you can say we were “Made in China.” We’ve now been married for 15 years, 1 month and 21 days. Our marriage started off much like how Tim Keller says most Western marriages start. He says you get married because “...you feel an attraction to the other person. You think he or she is wonderful” and Leigh was wonderful, both inside and out. But a year or two later (or sometimes even as early as the honeymoon) three things usually happen. “First, you begin to find out how selfish this wonderful person is. Second, you discover that the wonderful person has been going through a similar experience and he or she begins to tell you how selfish *you* are. And third, though you acknowledge it in part, you conclude that your spouse’s selfishness is more problematic than your own” (Keller, 63).

I remember exactly when in our marriage that my selfishness became apparent (though Leigh probably has examples much earlier than this). It was a few months into our marriage and I was on the couch watching TV or doing school work or something and Leigh asked me to get her something from the kitchen. I don’t remember what it was she wanted but I just remember thinking (if not actually saying it out loud), “You can get it yourself.”

Marriage is not easy and serving is not easy. But it is possible as we follow the pattern that God gives us and as we walk in the power that he supplies. The passage that we’re going to look at today is one of my favorite passages on marriage and one that has shaped my view of marriage probably more than any other in the Bible.

Context:

- Ephesians 1-3: the indicatives/truths of the gospel
- Ephesians 4-6: the imperatives/commands of the gospel.

- Walk worthy (4:1)
- Don't walk like the Gentiles (4:17ff)
- Walk in love (5:2)
- Walk as children of the light (5:8)
- Walk in wisdom (5:15)

Read Ephesians 5:15-21 and then 5:22-33

I. Serve imitating the pattern of the gospel.

Briefly explain 5:22-30

- 22-24:
 - Wives are called to submit to their husbands in the same way as the church submits to Christ.
- 25:
 - Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church.
- 26-27
 - How did Christ love the church?
 - He gave himself up for her (25).
 - He sanctified her (26)
 - He cleansed her (26)
 - He made her holy, without blemish (27).
- 28-30
 - Husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies, nourishing and cherishing her, in the same way that Christ loves the church, his body (cf. 5:23, 30).
 - Paul assumes knowledge of Genesis 2:24 and then makes it explicit.
- 31
 - Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, highlighting the “one flesh” nature of marriage. When you get married, you are one body with your spouse. If this is the case, then to not love her, to not nourish and cherish her is to hate and neglect your own body.
- 32
 - Paul introduces this concept of “mystery.”

What is a mystery?

- A mystery is something that was hidden for a season of time (in this case, the OT) but has now been revealed (in this case, with the coming of Jesus, and explicitly here in Ephesians 5).

What is the mystery?

- “As God made man in His own image, so He made earthly marriage in the image of His own eternal marriage with His people” (Geoffrey Bromiley, quoted by Piper on 76). The say this more clearly, the mystery is that marriage was created as a tangible and visible image of Christ and the church.

- “So marriage is like a metaphor or an image or a picture or a parable or a model that stands for something more than a man and a women becoming one flesh. It stands for the relationship between Christ and the church. That’s the deepest meaning of marriage. It’s meant to be a living drama of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and the church” (Piper, 75).

There are numerous implications for understanding this truth:

1. The ultimate meaning of marriage is to display the glory of God. In particular, it is to in a very tangible and real way image forth Christ’s covenant relationship with the church through one’s marriage. Another way to say this is that marriage is about displaying in your life the glory and beauty of the gospel.

- If you are married, this is why you are married.
- If you hope to be married one day, this should be your dream.

2. Marriage isn’t an afterthought. God created and designed marriage knowing already about his plan of redemption to save humans through Jesus Christ.

3. There is no human marriage after death (cf. Matt. 22:30; Mk. 12:25) because the shadow of our marriages gives way to the true reality of Christ and his church, the bride. We will be married to Christ for all eternity.

- This truth should guard us from idolizing marriage and the gifts of marriage.
- Romance, sexual intimacy and children are all temporary. They aren’t guaranteed in this life and they aren’t a part of the next life.
- Marriage to Jesus should be our ultimate pursuit.
- Singles: hear this. Marriage is temporary. Relationship to Jesus is ultimate. Relationships in Christ are more permanent than relationships in families.

4. Marriage is not mainly about staying in love but about keeping covenant love. It’s about displaying the never-ending, always persevering and enduring, steadfast and relentless love of Christ.

How do we practically display the gospel and glory of God in marriage?

1. Serve selflessly.

We’re going to look at the distinctive of husbands and wives in a second, but first, as followers of Jesus, we all must learn not to live for ourselves.

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Gal. 5:13-14 ESV)

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for

many." (Mk. 10:45 ESV)

- If believers are called to serve each other and imitate Christ in this way, how much more should a brother and sister in Christ who are married?

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; (1 Co. 13:4-5 ESV; cf. Phil. 2:3-5)

Tim Chester says this about love in his book on marriage:

- “The flip-side of love is self-denial. Love is putting someone else before myself: their interests, their wishes, their needs, their comfort” (Tim Chester, 52).

Paul Tripp, in his book on marriage defines love this way:

- “Love is willing self-sacrifice for the good of another that does not require reciprocation or that the person being loved is deserving” (Paul Tripp, 189).

What does this practically look like?

- “Love is being willing to have your life complicated by the needs and struggles of your husband or wife without impatience or anger” (Tripp, 191).
- “Love is being a good student of your spouse, looking for his physical, emotional, and spiritual needs so that in some ways you can remove the burden, support him as he carries it, or encourage him along the way” (Tripp, 194).
- “Love doesn’t wait around to be told what is needed and what to do. Love never sees her needs as an interruption. Love is burdened when she is burdened and finds joy in her relief. If you really love your husband or wife you will be willing to increase your load in order to lighten his or hers” (Tripp, 194).
- “Love is speaking kindly and gently, even in moments of disagreement, refusing to attack your spouse’s character or assault his or her intelligence” (Tripp, 195).
- “Love is the willingness to have less free time, less sleep, and a busier schedule in order to be faithful to what God has called you to be and to do as a husband or a wife” (Tripp, 197).
- “Love is staying faithful to your commitment to treat your spouse with appreciation, respect and grace, even in moments when he or she doesn’t seem to deserve it or is unwilling to reciprocate” (Tripp, 198).
- “Love is the willingness to make regular and costly sacrifices for the sake of your marriage without asking anything in return or using your sacrifices to place your spouse in your debt” (Tripp, 198).
- “Love is refusing to be self-focused or demanding but instead looking for specific ways to serve, support, and encourage, even when you are busy or tired” (Tripp, 200).

2. Serve distinctively.

As we reflect on this mystery, one thing that becomes clear is that the roles of husband and wife are not arbitrarily assigned, rather, they are patterned after Christ and the church. This means that

while both are to serve each other selflessly as we've discussed above, they are also to serve each other distinctively. What we have in Ephesians 5 is a redeeming and a recovery of the very roles that were distorted (not created) by sin. The gospel brings redemption into marriage.

Since the relationship of Christ and the church is the pattern, it helps us avoid error. Husbands have no right to control, abuse or neglect their spouses (Christ would never do that). Similarly, submission is not slavish or coerced (that's not how the church responds to Christ's love and leadership). How does Christ want the church to submit to him? Willingly, free, joyfully.

Piper gives us these helpful definitions:

“Headship is the divine calling of a husband to take primary responsibility for Christlike, servant leadership, protection, and provision in the home” (Piper, 80).

- This leadership is defined by Christ. It's a servant-leadership. The call to be a husband is a call to die daily. It's a call to get down on your knees and wash your wife's feet (John 13). It's not easy.
- Provision: both physical and spiritual
- Protection: both physical and spiritual

“Submission is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts” (Piper, 80).

- Your allegiance is first to Jesus (never follow your husband into sin).
- Your husband is not Christ and he needs transformation. Pray for him.
- Submission is a disposition and an inclination to follow a husband's lead (sometimes he may be wrong and you can humbly and graciously express your disposition and at the same time sharing your concern).
- What should a woman do if your husband is not leading, protecting or providing?
 - If you demand, he loses the opportunity to lead. It must be a work of God through his Word by his Spirit. Pray and look for a time to express your longings (not in a demanding way with ultimatums).

Transition (refer back to my initial story)

- Does anyone feel overwhelmed at the task and opportunity to display the glory of God in their marriage?

II. Serve walking in the power of the gospel.

If you are really going to cultivate a servant's heart in your marriage, there are a few crucial things that you've got to do:

1. You've must acknowledge and truly believe that the biggest problem in your marriage isn't your spouse. It's you!

- One of the greatest ways you can serve your spouse is by an ongoing willingness and commitment to change.

- Keller says this is one of the most powerful signs of love in a marriage (178).
- “If two spouses *each* say, ‘I’m going to treat my self-centeredness as the main problem in the marriage,’ you have the prospect of a truly great marriage” (Keller, 64).
- There’s even hope is just one of you chooses to live this way
- “Few things have a greater transforming impact on a husband or a wife than the long-suffering, forgiving sacrifices of love in the spouse” (Piper, 70).
- “This is the primary means by which Christ won the church. He died for her. So wives win their husbands mainly by their lives of sacrificial love, and husbands win their wives mainly by lives of sacrificial love” (Piper, 70).

2. You must come to Jesus in repentance and faith, trusting in the redeeming work of his life, death and resurrection.

3. You must have your soul satisfied in Jesus.

- “We come into our marriages driven by all kinds of fears, desires, and needs. If I look to my marriage to fill the God-sized spiritual vacuum in my heart, I will not be in position to serve my spouse. Only God can fill a God-sized hole. Until God has the proper place in my life, I will always be complaining that my spouse is not loving me well enough, not respecting me enough, not supporting me enough” (Keller, 73).
- This is what Paul assumes here (Eph. 2:10; 4:1; 5:18).

4. You must make knowing walking with Jesus through the power of the Spirit your greatest aim.

- To be honest, you don’t need another book on marriage. You need your life captured by the glory of God. You need a bigger vision. And then you need to pray that God helps you take that vision and apply it to your marriage.
- We love because he first loved us. (1 Jn. 4:19 ESV)