

# Ephesians 5:31-33

## Introduction

Over this passage Paul has so far written about submission, order, sacrifice, sanctification, caring, support, and building up. Now we'll take a look at unity, independence and respect. As we take a look at this passage we need to constantly be reminded that Paul wrote about the ideal marriage - as his parallel reference of Christ and the church reflects. Christ is the ideal groom, and due to the work of Christ, the sanctified church is the ideal bride. As we look at the departure from outside parental influence, the unity of a husband and wife, the love for a husband for his wife and the respect that the wife has for her husband it is in the context of the ideal marriage. So then how do we reconcile this ideal with the reality of our conditional marriage?

We look at conditional sanctification: we realize that our spouse is in the process of growing just like we are. We recognize that the Holy Spirit brings about fruit that exceeds the limitations of this passage. We recognize that our spouse is here for our growth, too. We recognize that we are to pour attention into our marriage so that as we abide we are doing and being the things Paul prescribes in this passage.

## Exposition

### Ephesians 5:31

FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.

In Genesis 2:24 Moses notes that because Eve was made from Adam's flesh that a man and wife should be joined as one apart from their parents. In Matthew 19:5 Christ quotes the very same verse in regards to divorce. Paul re-iterates this concept but with a different cause: the two should "leave and cleave" because of Christ and the church.

### ***"Leaving and Cleaving" or "Cleaving and Cleaving"***

#### *The error of not leaving<sup>1</sup>*

Shortly after I became engaged my dad said to me, "Randy, are you ready to be a man?" Of course I was not, the idea of being an independent leader for a household was something that scared me because failure seemed so substantially disastrous. My dad understood I would be leaving and starting my own household. My dad had brought out the 'cleaver' and was separating me from himself and my mother. I was to be a head of household. For the first nine months after getting married we lived near our parents and had a 3 and 4 mile set of apron string to our respective parents houses. Then we moved to Texas. The apron strings were sheared. For six weeks I was sick to my stomach because of fear of really, really, really having to be man on my own. I was

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<sup>1</sup> This is an exaggerated story from my own life. Its exaggerated to make the point.

going to have to really rely on the Lord and be a spiritual leader. By not leaving our parents households more definitely we had remained adult children.

### *The error of not really cleaving*

The median number of years before a divorce in the United States is 7 years. By then families have been started, finances have been ruined, and jobs have been pursued. The American dream has been dreamt, but it turned into a nightmare. Because the marriage was based on anything but the Lord, and never with an attitude of having been cemented together - a joint created that is stronger than the two individual pieces - the cleaving to one another in part creates a painful separation (Matt. 19:1-5). There seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means by one flesh.

### *One Flesh?*

While sexuality is often asserted as one of the primary applications of one flesh, and it is not ridiculous to point out that it does seem to come close to a unifying *physical* intimacy, Paul writes in the next verse that this one flesh concept is a great mystery. Which leads us to the conclusion that this is not merely a reference for sexual oneness. Paul is interested in an attitude and mindset of oneness. The perspective we have on our marriage is critical to our interpretation of the events in that marriage. Common marriage vows include a sentence that goes roughly like this: "To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health, to love and to cherish 'till death do us part." A marriage with a perspective of 50%-50% or anything other than oneness will fail at some point in time when one partner finds out what worse really meant, what poorer really meant, what sickness really meant and that cherishing was harder work than was anticipated when body parts begin to sag, dates get forgotten, events missed and trials come hard and heavy.

One flesh means we have a heavenly perspective on our partner: they're being conformed to the image of Christ and we have the privilege of watching our God at work. One flesh means that a husband spends a tremendous amount of time knowing his wife spiritually and making sure she's growing and knowing where he's growing (Ephesians 5:22-30). One flesh means that the husband knows why the pants his wife is trying on work on her body type: its his type of body because its hers. One flesh means being quick to listen (James 1:19). One flesh means loving reminders and not nagging (Gal. 5:22-23). Love covers a multitude of sins and doesn't keep track of how many its covered in the last 24 hours or 24 years (I Cor. 13:5d). One flesh means that you're *beholding the Lord together* (II Cor. 3:18).

### **Ephesians 5:32**

This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

Paul points out that the two being one is mysterious, but not ridiculous because the same ideal thing can be seen with Christ and the church (Col. 3:1-4). Paul's use of Christ as the ideal earlier in 5:23-26 brings us to the need to understand our identification with Christ. Furthermore we need to understand that Paul's illustration

shows the ideal of Christ and the church positionally not the ideal of the church conditionally.

**Ephesians 5:33**

Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

Wrapping back around to the principle of sacrificial love Paul brings the mystery back to the relationship of a husband recognizing that he is joined to his wife. He loves his wife as his own life and his own life is intertwined with her so that one cannot tell where one starts and the other ends.

*Respect*

Paul also wraps up the passage with a reference to the wife submitting to or respecting her husband. Respect is an attitude that demolishes opportunities for arguments. Respect brings about peace and bends ears to listen. Upon learning about the value of respect in marriage in a counseling class in seminary Jessica and I cried together as I drove home - both of us apologizing for errors based on a bad understanding of respect in the marriage. A husband can act and say things that are not respectable, and a wife can have an attitude of disrespect. The ideal here is a savior who demands our respect because He gave His very life.