

Marriage is a Means to Holiness

April 21, 2010 by [Drew](#)

Marriage exists to help us make much of Christ. I have been striving to define marriage this way in the last two newsletters that I have written. [First](#) I made the argument that *you* are what is wrong with your marriage. I wasn't trying to be mean or judgmental but simply wanted to point out that marital problems are not primarily circumstantial but rather they arise because in every case, marriage is a covenant entered into by two sinners. Sin comes from within the [human heart](#), not from without (Mark 7:20-23). If we want our marriages to improve, we need God to change our *hearts* not our circumstances. In my [second article](#), I argued that Dr. Phil can't fix your marriage or mine. The reason being that much of the [marital advice](#) given by secular marriage experts is based on *compromise* between two people of differing mindsets and passions. I therefore argued that what our marriages need is not a healthy dose of compromise but a common vision and goal. [Husbands and wives](#), to have a healthy relationship, need to be going in the same direction. They need to be pursuing something together, namely Jesus Christ and conformity to Him.

When I read Ephesians 5:22-33, I think we see the purpose of marriage very clearly. God designed marriage to make us holy—to make us more and more like Christ and thus to magnify Christ in greater and greater degree during our sojourn here on earth. Does that mean that [single people](#) are less holy? No not at all (1 Cor. 7:6-7), it just means that God has designed marriage in a unique way such that it provides special opportunities to image Christ to the world.

So how can your marriage display the glory of Christ more clearly? How has God designed your marriage as a *means* to holiness? I can think of at least three ways:

Marriage is a means to holiness by . . .

1. Its very nature. [God created](#) marriage to be a "one flesh" union (Gen. 2:23-24; Eph. 5:31). In the Old Testament, "flesh" more often than not is synonymous with "person." In other words the idea of sinful flesh or the flesh being synonymous with the sinful nature is a not what is intended by marriage being a "one flesh" union. For example, in Genesis 6:12, just before the flood, we learn that "God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all *flesh* had corrupted their way on the earth." Clearly here, God means that all *people* corrupted their way on the earth. Thus in being one flesh, a husband and a wife are no longer two people but one. This idea of "one flesh" certainly carries a sexual aspect but it is much bigger than that. Inside of marriage, you can no longer think of yourself as an autonomous individual. Marriage by its very nature attacks selfishness and self-worship. What is at the heart of your marital squabbles? If you are honest before God, is

2. not selfishness at the root? As a follower of Christ, God has graced you with a spouse to reveal your own selfishness to you so that you might repent from it and He will uproot it out of you and make you more like Jesus. That is [good news](#) and God has designed your marriage to do that on a regular basis. Marriage shows us our sin so that we might hate it and repent from it and thus image Christ more clearly.
1. Its roles. [Wives](#) and husbands are clearly equal in Scripture (Gal. 3:28-29; Gen. 1:26-28; 1 Peter 3:7), but Ephesians 5:22-33 clearly gives them different commands. God commands wives to “submit to their husbands as to the Lord” (v22) and husbands to “love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (v25). In the curses pronounced upon Adam and Eve in the fall, we see that there is going to conflict inside of marriage because they will struggle to keep these commands (Gen. 3:16). We could probably all attest to the fact that husbands get frustrated when they feel they are not respected and wives get frustrated when they don’t feel loved. The headship of the husband is not all about making all the big decisions, let’s not forget that the husband and wife are now “one flesh” In fact, the husbands headship is primarily *spiritually* directed. The primary way in which husbands are to lead their wives is *toward* Christ (Eph. 5:25-27). Husbands lead primarily through love—loving in a self-sacrificial, Christ-like way that frees the wife to grow in her relationship to Christ because she is receiving the kind of love [that God](#) intended for her inside of marriage. Similarly, wives point their husbands to Christ by submitting to them *as to the Lord* (Eph. 5:22). This doesn’t mean that wives are to blindly do whatever their husbands say, it means they strive to respect their husbands and submit to their humble headship out of love for Christ.

Husbands its worth noting at this point, that the Bible actually doesn’t say anything about you taking the back seat when it comes to keeping house and raising the children. In fact you are to be the lead discipler of your children (Eph. 6:1-3) and are to love your wife in a self-sacrificial way (Eph. 5:25). The Bible tells us more about who we are supposed to be in marriage than it does about exactly what we are supposed to do. It is clear, you are to love your wife to such an extent that you would give your life for her—that may mean swallowing your pride, turning off the TV and helping her around the house. Similarly, wives when you do not feel loved there is a very discouraging and disrespectful way to express that which will crush your husband. Strive to respect him—even when you disagree with him. Work to communicate your frustrations and disagreements in a way that values and respects your husband. Husbands when you love your wives like Christ loves the church, they will find joy in submitting to your Christ-like leadership. Wives when you respect your husbands, they will find joy in loving you self-sacrificially. When we live faithfully inside the roles God created for marriage, we display the glory of Christ in our marriages.

1. By its evangelism. Marriage is a mighty tool in the hands of God to take the gospel to the world. When we live within the roles God created to be exercised in marriage, a godly marriage then naturally displays the gospel—husbands are showing the love of Christ for the church by giving of themselves for the good of their wives and wives are submitting to them out of love for Christ. Godly marriages are grace-centered, deep hurts can be overcome inside of Christian marriages because they are grounded in the gospel that tells us that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:11-12).

There is a call inside of Christian marriage to invite unbelievers into our lives, to let them see the way we live and be challenged by it. If we are living the way that God calls us to live in marriage, we will display the grace of Christ in the gospel—we will stick out from the secular marriages around us that are treading through the muddled waters of compromise. God has designed Christian marriage to be a display of Christ's redemptive love for the church—thus your marriage is a mighty tool to draw both your neighbors and the nations to himself!