

Ephesians 5:22-33 (DHT)

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless.

In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, since we are members of his body. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church.

To sum up, each of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.

The Marriage of Tyler and Megan Forga

I have known Megan all her life. Our late grandfather was a retired Baptist minister. For many years, he had wanted to officiate at his first granddaughter’s wedding, something Megan wanted as well. But the Lord had other plans and brought him home just before COVID began. And so you can imagine the tremendous honor it was when Megan asked me to fill in for our late grandfather and officiate her union to this man.

You may not know this about the bride and groom, but about 23 years ago Tyler and Megan participated in a children’s pageant and happened to be paired up. Little did anyone know that that pageant would not be Tyler’s last time walking Megan down an aisle. They have been together through the highs and lows in each other’s lives. They have seen every holiday together (a few times) and they enjoy each other’s families. When asked what she liked most about Tyler, Megan remarked to me that for as long as she has known him, he has been a caring man who takes responsibility; that he makes her feel safe, protected, and taken care of.

Ephesians 5 is a classic Scripture passage for weddings, for it reveals the ultimate purpose of marriage. The Apostle Paul writes that marriage illustrates Christ’s love for the Church. The mystery of marriage reveals the Gospel.

How can it be that marriage illustrates what Christ did for the People of God that first Easter weekend? Because we are still sinners. I am a sinner; Tyler, you are a sinner; Megan, you are a sinner; not because of any one thing we’ve done but because Scripture says all of us are sinners. Your marriage is not going to solve this; you aren’t perfect and you’re marrying someone who also is not perfect. This shouldn’t come as a shock to either of you--or to your families--but it can be easy to forget this important truth when challenges arise.

In a few minutes you are going to symbolize your unity by pouring sand from Tyler and glitter from Megan into one container. You *will* be able to distinguish the two elements you blend together, but it is just that: blended together. It will no longer be just glitter or just sand, but a glittery sand. While you will be able to see the unique qualities in one another, they no longer are inseparable from your own. You are mixing yourselves together in marriage so what Scripture says is fulfilled: the two will become one.

I have heard it said that marriage is like a magnifying glass. The intricacies of your strengths will be abundantly clear to one another, but so will your weaknesses. Despite being together nearly one decade already, you are going to learn things about each other over the course of the next six or so decades that you do not know today. You’re going to get frustrated with one another. It will be easy to love one another when you feel the positive emotions you feel today. But it is instead when the inevitable frustrations arise that the true nature of your love is revealed. You might say the wrong thing or say the right thing in the wrong way. The way you resolve these is when the truth of your love will be shown. So, I have for you today three keys to take with you into your marriage.

The first key is mercy. To give mercy means to withhold something bad the other does deserve. When the other is getting on your nerves, mercy is taking a breath and showing patience not by listening to respond but listening to understand; taking a moment to lower the temperature when everything in you tells you to fire the cannons so you always speak calmly, clearly, and gently to one another, because reconciliation ought always be the goal. Showing mercy therefore means abstaining from keeping score of wrongs, something which only leads to bitterness. Thus, in a marriage without mercy, love is conditional. But “mercy sweetens marriage. Where it is absent, two people flog one another over everything from failure to fix the faucet to [bills, bills,

bills]. But where [mercy] is present, marriage grows sweeter and more delightful, even in the face of challenges, setbacks, and the persistent effects of our remaining sin.”¹

The second key is grace. To give grace means to give something good that the other does not deserve. When disagreements ensue, give the other the benefit of the doubt, not questioning their motives. When the other irritates you or falls short of your expectations, think to yourself, are they falling short of a caricature I have made of them in my head? Am I being realistic with this expectation? Having realistic expectations is vital and should always begin with that truth from a few moments ago: you are both sinners. You are going to mess up. Getting this expectation right simply means the work you put into your marriage ought to be grounded in reality. “Grace is not opposed to effort, [but] is opposed to earning.”² Getting this expectation right means that to keep score of rights leads only to division. Therefore, in a marriage without grace, love is conditional.

The third key is forgiveness, the place where mercy and grace meet. To forgive one another does not mean to forget or to enable, but instead means to “resolve to revoke revenge.”³ Ruth Graham, the wife of Billy Graham, says, “Because marriage is a union between two sinners, it should be a union between two relentless forgivers.” Those in attendance who are married can tell you that when you mess up, saying “I’m sorry” goes a long way, but even more powerful and life-giving are the words on the other side of those apologies, “I forgive you.” You both will need to practice forgiving one another when the other wrongs you; because to hold onto the wrongs of the other will only plant seeds of resentment. But “forgiveness is the fertile soil in which unity in marriage grows.”⁴ Thus, in a marriage without forgiveness, love is conditional.

The Apostle Paul writes in Eph. 5 that marriage is a mystery that reveals the relationship between Christ and his Church, who are also called his bride. And so these three keys—mercy, grace, and forgiveness—are not just critical to preserving and strengthening your marriage until the end of your days, but they are also critical to understanding the love of God in the Gospel. When your marriage is at its best you are modeling Christ and his Church.

Paul writes elsewhere that God proves his love for us like this: that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us...we were *reconciled* to God by the death of his son (Rom. 5:8-10). The

¹ Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say ‘I Do’: Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage* (Wapwallowpen: Shepherd Press) pg. 80.

² Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential Teaching on Discipleship* (New York: Harper One, 2006) pg. 61.

³ Sam Storms, “Forgiveness: What is it and What is it Not?” *Acts29*. May 4, 2011.

⁴ Paul David Tripp, “Cancelling Debts.” *Growing Marriages*.

writer of Hebrews echoes this by quoting the prophet Jeremiah: “For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more” (Heb. 8:12). Christ’s sacrifice for the Church shows mercy not by keeping a record of her wrongs to lord over her, but instead by pursuing her as her sacrificial leader for the sake of reconciliation. This is the love of God shown through the *mercy* of Christ.

Paul writes elsewhere that God proves his love for us like this: that he sent and *gave* his only son Jesus so those who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Earlier in this letter Paul writes that it is by grace and specifically not by what they do that anyone receives salvation (Eph. 2:8-9). Christ’s sacrifice for the Church shows grace not by placing unattainable expectations on her or conditioning her acceptance and approval, but instead by living the life she could not live on her own for the sake of building up her life to the fullest. This is the love of God shown through the *grace* of Christ.

The Psalmist asks, “If you, YHWH, kept count of iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness” (Ps. 130:3-4). Earlier in this letter as well as in another letter, Paul writes that we are to forgive as Christ forgave us (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). Christ’s sacrifice for the Church showed forgiveness to her, not by appealing to his privileges as the Son of God, but instead by humbling himself and sacrificing himself for those who did not deserve it (Phil. 2:5-11). This is the *love* of God shown through the *forgiveness* of Christ.

These three keys—mercy, grace, and forgiveness—are not just keys to lifelong love; they are also keys to understand the Gospel: that despite our sinfulness, God sent his Son Jesus to live the life we could not live, and die the death our sins deserve, so that all who believe in his resurrection would be forgiven of their sins and granted eternal life in the presence of God. The mercy, grace, and forgiveness of God converge in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Paul writes earlier in this letter, it is in the sacrifice of Jesus that we have redemption and forgiveness from our mistakes, all in accordance with the riches of his grace to lead us toward his ultimate purpose for us: our total reconciliation (Eph. 1:7-10).

Tyler, our passage today calls you to love and to lead Megan as Christ loved and led the Church. Just as Christ loved the church by beautifying her, so also should you work to make Megan even more beautiful to you each day. Paul tells us that when you do this, you not only love her but you also love yourself because the two of you are one. You could say that this is the biblical version of “happy wife, happy life.”

Megan, our passage today calls you to submit to Tyler as the Church submits to Christ. In our current age when patriarchal platitudes are rightly criticized, one may have a sharp reaction to words like “submit.” But the passage defines what it means for wives to submit in its concluding statement: *to sum up...the wife is to respect her husband*. Megan, our passage today calls you to submit not by blind obedience, but instead by respecting and supporting Tyler’s sacrificial leadership.

A marriage such as this is one that loves even in adversity. In a marriage like this, Paul’s words elsewhere ring true: Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not boast. Love is neither arrogant, nor rude; neither self-serving, nor irritable. Love neither keeps a record of wrongs, nor finds joy in unrighteousness, but instead rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things. Love believes all things. Love hopes all things. And love endures all things, for love never ends (1 Cor. 13:4-8a).

Amen.