



Husband and Wives, Talk!

By Thomas Eglinton

“What often happens is that married people begin to take each other for granted. They go their separate ways in the face of the pressures of work and the multiplying responsibilities of maintaining a home and providing for children. Instead of becoming more interdependent, a husband and wife become more independent. Before they know it, they wake up six years later and say, ‘Who is this person lying beside me in the bed?’” So says Dr Joel Beeke.

One of the goals of marriage is unity. The Bible describes this by saying that “The two shall become one flesh.” ‘Unity’ has synonyms like harmony, cooperation, togetherness, solidarity, peace, oneness, cohesion. The idea of one flesh union is that husband and wife get on with each other. They are united; they are in agreement; they are at peace.

In the beginning, God gave Adam a job – to tend and keep the garden and to have dominion over the earth. He then gave Eve to Adam as a helper in this task. The idea of one flesh in this context becomes a bit clearer. They are to operate together as one to complete the assigned task. Like a complex organism working together to survive. Or like a pride of lions or a siphonophore (look it up).

This sort of unity doesn’t just happen.

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

At first glance, Paul appears to be teaching on marriage in Ephesians 5:22-32. But then he gets carried away (in typical Pauline fashion) and all of a sudden you realise that he isn’t talking about human marriage anymore, he is talking about Christ and the Church.

“This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” (v 32, ESV)

Paul is saying that marriage between a man and a woman was designed by God to be a picture of Christ and the church.

God refers to Israel as his bride in the Old Testament as well. In Jeremiah 3 and Ezekiel 16 God is angry with Israel because she has been an adulterous wife (Ezek. 16:32, Jer. 3:20). We see similar imagery in Isaiah 54:5 and Hosea 2.

So, we see that the marriage between God and His people is a key theme in scripture. You could say that the real marriage is the one between God and His people, and human marriage is based on that real marriage.

What this truth does is take us from having a few ‘marriage passages’ in the Bible that we can go to in order to learn about marriage to having the entire biblical story.

And so, in order to apply this principle to our current topic: if we want to know how a husband and wife can be united as one flesh, we need to look at how Jesus is united to the church – how God is united to his people.

There are many truths we could look at in this regard but I just want to show you one. One of the ways God becomes united to His people is through talking to them and getting to know them.

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF TO HIS BRIDE

The entire Bible is God revealing himself to His people. He tells us what He is like (e.g. Deut. 4:24, Ps 103:13, Is 6:3). He tells us about His character. He tells us what He has done. He tells us what He is planning on doing. He tells us how He feels about

us (e.g. Rom 5:8, Deut. 5:10, Prov 8:17). He tells us how He evaluates things that we do (e.g. Prov 6:16-19, Is 61:8 Prov 15:9).

When we read the Bible, we are a wife listening to her husband open his heart. We are getting to know our Husband.

God also reveals himself to us every Sunday as His people meet together to hear from His Word. I have heard the church service described as God telling His people how much He loves them. When the gospel is preached faithfully, that is exactly what is happening. God's bride is being reminded that her Husband loves her.

GOD KNOWS HIS BRIDE

When a person believes on Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in his or her heart. This is a remarkable truth. The Spirit of God, perfect in holiness, comes and lives in us. The Holy Spirit comes to speak truth to our heart as well as to know us intimately and to change us from the inside out (1 Cor 3:16, 2 Cor 1:22, Rom 8:9-16, Eph 2:22, Gal 4:6, Rom 5:5). In Romans 8:26, the Spirit is described as knowing our weaknesses so that He can intercede for us on our behalf.

In addition to the Spirit's work, Hebrews tells us that part of the purpose of Jesus taking on flesh and suffering as a man was so that he could be a sympathetic high priest (Heb 4:14-16). Jesus knows our sufferings because he has partaken in them. He knows what it is to be tempted and to feel human (but not sinful) weakness.

GOD'S PEOPLE OPEN UP TO GOD

What we also see in the Bible is a bride who talks to God and reveals herself to Him. Particularly in the Psalms we see how God's bride can and should talk to God about how we are feeling, what has happened to us recently, what we are planning on doing, what our hopes and dreams are, and how much God means to us. We do this in prayer as we pour our hearts out to God (Ps 62:8).

IMITATE THE REAL MARRIAGE

Bringing this all back to where we started, if we want marriages that are marked by unity, we need to imitate the marriage between Christ and the church.

One of the things this means practically is that husband and wives need to talk.

As a Christian husband and wife talk together about their experiences, their feelings, their hopes and dreams, their struggles and their joys, they will grow closer together and become more united.

Husbands, open your heart to your wife. Tell her how you feel.

Talk to her about why you feel down. Share your joy with her. Tell her what you did during the day. Tell her what you plan on doing. Speak to her about your struggles and your fears. Open your heart to your wife. Tell your wife you love her. Tell her this regularly in different ways (just like how God gives us different sermons each Sunday). Tell her how you find her beautiful.

Husbands, seek to know your wife. Take up residence near her in order to know her intimately. Spend time with her. Ask her about her day. Ask her how different experiences made her feel. Don't try to fix everything immediately, just seek to know her. Find out her hopes and dreams. Search out her struggles. Sing her praises (Prov.31)

Wives, pour out your heart to your husband. Share your experiences, your sorrows, your joys with him. Tell him how much he means to you. Tell him what you appreciate about him. Sing his praises.

Wives, seek to know your husband. Be excited to hear about the work he is doing. Find out how you can help him, how you can share in his work. Don't neglect meeting with him. Plan to have energy when he gets home that you can use in enjoying his company.

THE GOSPEL IS CRITICAL

Revealing our hearts comes with dangers. Over time, one of the difficulties in marriage is that you get to know your spouse's sins. This can breed bitterness. It is vital that we keep the gospel at the forefront of our mind.

Jesus has paid for the sins of your spouse so you don't need to. When your spouse sins, he or she is sinning primarily against God, not primarily against you.

Knowing the particular sinful struggles of your spouse is actually a God-given opportunity for you to love your husband or wife very specifically. We have the privilege of praying for them in their struggles, speaking truth in times of temptation and reminding them of the gospel of our glorious God.

THE WAY TO UNITY

Husbands and wives, talk to each other. The more you talk to each other, the more united you will be. The more united you are, the more you will work together in harmony and peace. The more you work harmoniously, the greater impact you will have as you seek to be salt and light, shining the glory of Christ to this dark world.

Tom is the manager at Reformers Bookshop and an elder at Smithfield Baptist Church.