



### **Ephesians 5:21-33**

#### **Christ and the Church, a pattern for marriage – Leader's version**

#### **For a one hour study, just do the starred \* questions**

The key verse in this passage is v32, '...but I am talking about Christ and the church.' There is much here that we can learn about God's pattern for human marriage, but don't forget that the passage is actually about Christ and the church!

**Check in** – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

1. Once again, this passage follows the train of thought of the previous passage (Eph 5:1-21). What did you learn last week?

*The last study focussed on our behaviour and living a life that honours God.*

#### **What does the passage say and mean?**

60 minutes

**\*2. SHOUT-OUT** What is love is like, according to 1 Corinthians 13:4-7?

*Keep this list visible through the session to help you as you answer other questions. As Paul writes Ephesians 5, he's not giving us a list of rules, he's showing us how we should treat each other, and, on a human level, it's all about love. On a spiritual level, it relates to Christ's headship of the church.*

#### **Read Ephesians 5:21-33**

**\*3.** Why should Christians submit to one another, v21, and do you think there is any time when this is not appropriate?

*You may need to explain 'submit' – to surrender to someone else's authority or will, in a relationship of trust. We submit to each other out of reverence for Christ, v21 i.e. because we want to honour Christ. This doesn't mean we have to do whatever anyone else tells us – we should not be 'doormats'. The big picture is of getting along, not arguing etc.*

*Our ultimate authority is Scripture and we only submit to others if doing so doesn't contradict Scripture.*

**\*4. Who does the Bible say should lead in a Christian marriage? (v22-24)**

*The husband. This will probably create a heated discussion! Submission to each other is universal, v21 – although wives are given particular instruction about submission to their husband (it's not talking about the relationship between all women and all men, but a wife and her husband). Paul is not talking about male domination or justifying abuse / oppression of women, but about responsibilities within marriage.*

*Don't confuse worth with role – we are all equal in God's sight, it's how men and women relate within marriage that is being defined here. The woman submits, v22, because she loves her husband, not through oppression, and the husband is to love his wife, v25. God gave authority to the man and, for both partners, obedience is because of ultimate submission to God.*

*It's important to stress that we're talking about Christian marriage – we cannot expect this of non-believers!*

**\*5. What pattern are we are told that this is based on?**

*Christ's headship of the church.*

**\*?**

What do you think the marriage in Ephesians 5:22-24 looks like in practice?

*It is important to remember that we all submit to Christ (v24) and we are all told to submit to one another (v21). The leader's notes to Q3 will help you with this question too.*

*Our pattern is Christ. The authority and headship of a husband is not domination, but sacrificial leadership which seeks to build up his wife.*

*Husbands are never told to make their wives obey them – they are simply told to love them.*

**\*6. Read v25, v27 and v33. How should husbands treat their wives?**

*They should love their wives sacrificially and give up everything for them. Love protects against domination and abuse of the command to submit. His should encourage his wife, build her up, help her self-confidence, re-assure her that she is beautiful and attractive to him. He should help her grow in her faith and become more Christ-like, as he sets an example.*

**\*7. How do v22 and v25 work together?**

*Since the husband loves his wife, the wife can submit, knowing she is safe in his love. The wife who recognises her husband's authority respects her husband (v33) and recognises God's authority in the marriage.*

8. What did Christ do for the church (v25-27)?

*He loved the church and sacrificed himself for it to make it holy, beautiful and blameless. He gave us his righteousness when he paid for sin. He is sanctifying each of us (making us holy) and therefore the church.*

9. Read v28-30. Paul is talking about the church, using the analogy of loving our bodies.

What does Paul say that Christ does for the church?

*Feeds and cares for it.*

10. What does this mean?

*Christ spiritually feeds us – he teaches us about himself and reveals himself to us as we listen and pray. He cares for us – he is always with us, always watching over us and will never let go of us (John 10:28).*

\*11. **SHOUT OUT** Thinking about Paul's analogy to loving our bodies in v29, in what ways do we not love our bodies?

*Think about addiction, promiscuity, eating disorders, smoking, self-harming etc. Be careful, some of these issues may trigger someone in the group.*

**\*?**

Are there any ways you abuse your body? Are you prepared to take steps to start to care for your body in a more God-honouring way?

*Gently encourage practical application of SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time frame).*

\*12. What is the Biblical way of treating your body?

*To love your body – to feed it, care for it etc.*

13. Paul uses another analogy in v31, taken from Genesis 2:24. What does v31 describe?

*It's the Biblical definition of marriage.*

**\*?**

Has this study challenged your view of marriage?

14. What is Paul using the picture of marriage to remind us of?

*The relationship between Christ and the church – they are inseparable, Christ is the head and the church loves and submits to Him.*

15. Read Revelation 19:7. Jesus is 'the Lamb' and the people (i.e. the church) are 'the bride'. What does it mean for us to be the bride of Christ?

*To be 'one flesh' with Christ – to be cherished / nourished / loved / protected by him for ever as a binding covenant. The relationship between Christ and the church is the perfect pattern for Christian marriage. A Christian marriage involves two forgiven sinners. Two forgiven sinners are still able to sin and make mistakes, but Christ is not going to mess up the marriage between himself and His church.*

16. What does it mean for the church to submit to the authority of Christ?

*The church is the people, not the building – i.e. every believer, as an individual as well as part of the corporate body. Submitting to Jesus' authority means living by his revealed word – the Bible.*

**Check out** – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.



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#### **Read Ephesians 5:21-33**

3. Why should Christians submit to one another, v21, and do you think there is any time when this is not appropriate?

4. Who does the Bible say should lead in a Christian marriage (v22-24) and who gave them this role?

5. What pattern are we are told that this is based on?

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What do you think the marriage in Ephesians 5:22-24 looks like in practice?

6. Read v25, v27 and v33. How should husbands treat their wives?
7. How do v22 and v25 work together?
8. What did Christ do for the church (v25-27)?
9. Read v28-30. Paul is talking about the church, using the analogy of loving our bodies. What does Paul say that Christ does for the church?
10. What does this mean?
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