Marriage And The Bride Of Christ (Part 9)
Becoming One Flesh
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It seems that people tend to make the mistake of viewing marriage from a human perspective rather than from God's perspective. God the Father and Jesus Christ are not going to copy the human marriage institution in their plans for Christ's marriage to His Bride—the Church!

So we look to the marriage of Christ to the Church for the right perspective of human marriage.

Jesus Christ is the perfect Bridegroom; He is the supreme standard that all other husbands should seek to emulate. All marriages should be fashioned after the marriage between Christ and the Church. Human wives and the spiritual Bride of Christ, the Church, must look to the inspired written word of God for instruction on how to have the right perspective and relationship with husbands and the Bridegroom.

The love, the joy, the peace that must be present in any truly successful Christian marriage only comes by God's Spirit as the Christian husband and wife strive to be teachable, obedient, and submissive in their intimate relationship with the Father and Christ.

God has given us, in His carefully designed plan, a workshop in which we can gain experience and understanding of how God's family is designed to work.

Through human Christian marriage and family we learn a great deal about how God views His family; how family relationships between family members are to work; how the hierarchy in a family works and what the responsibilities and duties of family members are.

In this Marriage and Family sermon series, I have been attempting to help us all to understand marriage and family from God's perspective, and this comes from understanding the mystery concerning Christ and the church.

It does not matter whether you are single or married, these marriage principles concerning Christ and the church are applicable to every member of God's church. All baptized members of the church are part of the Bride of Christ and therefore must understand this mystery concerning Christ and the church.
Ephesians 5:25-33 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The KJV and NKJV versions have weakly translated the beginning of verse 32 as, ÒThis is a great mystery, but the ESV, RSV, and NIV translations are grammatically correct in translating verse 32 as, ÒThis mystery is great, or, ÒThis mystery is profound.Ó The Greek word, Òmega,Ó translated here as ÒgreatÓ or Òprofound,Ó expresses magnitude rather than intensity. We might say that it is of far reaching importance; or, it has many implications. But what is meant by the word ÒmysteryÓ and what mystery is meant?

In Paul’s use of the Greek word ÒmysteryÓ in this letter, he means a secret of revelation made known through a special dispensation (or privilege) of grace.

Ephesians 3:1-6 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.

Usually, the mystery includes the total collection of God’s purposes in Christ, but sometimes it may also refer to some specific truth within the wider revelation as we see in Ephesians 5:32, ÒThis mystery is great, this mystery is profound, but I speak
concerning Christ and the church.”

This correct rendering emphasizes not so much that it is hard to understanding, but that this mystery—this doctrine—is a great one. The truth here, which is hidden from the eyes of the world, is revealed in Christ as a wonderful and great truth.

**Spiritual Union**

We are still considering the doctrine of Christ’s relationship to the Church. But it does not end even at what we have seen. We have to go further; and we will find that the apostle Paul’s teaching rises to still greater heights.

In a way, it is hard to imagine that there could be something more exalted than the 27th verse of chapter 5 where we are given a glimpse of what is awaiting us as the Bride of Christ, as members of God’s church: “That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”

But the teaching goes even further; there is something still more wonderful and almost incredible, and that is the extraordinary doctrine of the spiritual union between Christ and the Church.

Paul’s concern is that we do not truly understand what marriage means until we understand this doctrine of the spiritual union between Christ and the Church. Each of the doctrines helps to throw light upon the other.

The spiritual union between Christ and the church helps us to understand the union between husband and wife, and the union between husband and wife in turn sheds a certain amount of light on the spiritual union between Christ and the church.

That is the wonderful thing about this whole statement. Human analogy and illustration help us to understand God’s truth, but in the last analysis it is the understanding of God’s truth that enables us to understand everything else; so Paul passes from one to the other.

The union between Christ and the Church is very comforting and exciting; and the apostle Paul is very specific in what he says in verse 32, “This mystery is great—this mystery is profound.” So we have to approach it carefully.

Apart from the revelation and understanding that the Holy Spirit enables, we would not
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be able to truly and fully understand this mystery.

To the unconverted world, this spiritual marriage is sheer nonsense. Even to the Christian it is a great mystery. But we thank God that the use of the term ɹmysteryɄ in the New Testament never carries the idea that it is something that cannot be understood at all.

Mystery means, ɹSomething that is inaccessible to the unaided human mind.Ʉ It does not matter how great the mind may be. The greatest brain in the world, or the greatest philosopher, if he does not have God's Spirit in him, is not merely a novice; he is less than a babe. In fact, he is dead in the spiritual sense. He has no understanding whatsoever of a subject like this.

This is spiritual truth, and it is only understood in a spiritual manner. The best comment on all this is in I Corinthians from 2:6 to the end of the chapter. It is not surprising therefore that such an important subject has been frequently misunderstood.

_I Corinthians 2:6-16_ However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Between I Corinthians and Ephesians there is a space of about nine years. In these
nine years Paul had realized that the Second Coming would not be as soon as he thought, and the Church was not living in a temporary situation, but in a more or less permanent situation.

And so, it is in Ephesians that we find Paul teaching that Christian marriage is the most precious human relationship in life, which we can understand only through the revelation of the relationship between Christ and the Church.

Ephesians 5:32 This mystery is great, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

That is the mystery to which Paul is referring. It casts its light on human marriage between a man and a woman, but he is talking about Christ and the church. So the real mystery is the relationship between Christ and the church.

A Great Mystery

Now what is the meaning of, This mystery is great? Paul means that it is a matter that is profound; a matter that challenges all your resources, a matter that is very insightful and that shows the need of what he has already prayed for on behalf of these people in chapter 1 of Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:15-18 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

If this great mystery is not approached with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, there are three main dangers that confront people who take a secular view of it. The first danger is not to consider it at all. And, that is the position of many professing Christians who consider it too difficult to bother to understand and rush on to the next verse.

The mere fact that there are difficulties in Scripture does not mean that we should bypass them. They are there for our learning and instruction; and however difficult they may be, we must do our best to understand them and to grasp them. That is one of the
reasons for the existence of God's church.

That is why Christ has given some apostles, some prophets, some pastors, some evangelists, some teachers, and so on. It is in order to instruct us in these things, so that we may grapple with them.

You will never understand your own marriage, if you are married, unless you try to understand this. The reason that Paul wrote about Christ and the Church is to help you to understand the importance of marriage.

The second danger is to deal with it in a way that does away with the mystery, or to detract from the mystery. There have been many, including commentators, who have done so. They have been so afraid of this mystical union, and this teaching about it, that they have reduced it to a mere matter of general likeness, a mere unity of interests, and so on. But that is to take the mystery right out of it.

It is not an exaggeration by Paul; he is not just trying to be dramatic. Paul deliberately tells us that this mystery is great. We must not make it into something ordinary. In the fear of saying too much, we sometimes say too little.

The third danger is the danger of attempting to work out all this in too much detail. We have to be careful not to go overboard in trying to understand it, and to work out the imagery in such detail that the analogy breaks down. We must not work it out to the point that there is no mystery left. Obviously that is equally wrong, because Paul himself says that this mystery is great!

That does not mean that we do not understand it at all, but it does mean that we do not understand it perfectly, that we do not understand it entirely, that there is still something that eludes us, something that leaves us gasping with astonishment and amazement.

So we should avoid these particular pitfalls as we face this great mystery. This is a wonderful truth; and we rise here to those unique heights that are found only in Scripture.

What is the apostle Paul's teaching about this spiritual relationship between Christ and the church? We can start with something with which we are very familiar, because we have seen it before in this epistle.

The first thing he tells us is that the church is the body of Christ. Remember, Ephesians 5:28 says, "So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies."
Then he adds in verse 29, “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.”

And then more specifically in verse 30, “For we are members of His body.” He has already introduced this teaching at the end of chapter 1, and then again in chapter 4, verse 16. But Paul is careful to remind us of this because he is intent on bringing out the principle of the intimate character of the relationship. It is the relationship between the head and the members of the body.

What he is concerned to emphasize is that the relationship between husband and wife is not mere external relationship. There is an external relationship, but much more than that. The essential characteristic of marriage is not simply that two people live together.

The Head of the Body

That is only the beginning; a great deal lies beyond this; and there is something deeper here, something much more wonderful. The church, Paul says, is really a part of Christ. As the members of the body are a part of the body, of which the head is the chief part, so Christ is Head of the church.

As Paul puts it at the end of chapter 1,

**Ephesians 1:22-23** And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

And again, in chapter 4,

**Ephesians 4:15-16** But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head Christ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

We must hold on to that principle, because it is an essential preliminary to understanding the doctrine of the spiritual union.

But that is only Paul’s introduction. He goes further, and in Ephesians 5:30 he adds,
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For we are members of His body, then he makes this extraordinary addition, of His flesh, and of His bones. He is talking about the relationship of the Church and Jesus Christ.

It is here that we really enter into the mystery. The notion of the Church as the body of Christ, while difficult, is not as difficult as this addition, of His flesh, and of His bones.

Some have tried to avoid this altogether by pointing out that in certain manuscripts this addition is not present; but it is generally agreed by the best authorities that in the best manuscripts this is present. So we cannot solve the problem that way.

And certainly the whole context, and the following quotation from Genesis 2, makes it essential that we should keep it here; otherwise there is no point or purpose in the quotation. In Ephesians 5:30, Paul is clearly referring to Genesis 2; and he is certainly doing the same here in Ephesians 4. And so, here, we enter into the very heart of this mystery. We must bear in mind that Paul’s intent, his purpose, is still the same. There is the danger; if he just leaves it at saying that the Church is the body of Christ, it is possible that his readers may still think of it in terms of some loose attachment.

We must not, of course, do that, because anyone who knows anything about the body knows that it does not consist of a loose attachment of a number of parts. It cannot be repeated too frequently that the body does not consist of a number of fingers stuck on a hand and a hand stuck on a forearm, and so on. The essential thing about a body is the vital organic unity. This important point must be emphasized to safeguard the principle that Paul teaches in verse 30, We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

The only way to extract the proper interpretation of verse 30, it seems, is to follow the hint that is given us by the apostle Paul himself, and go back to the statement that he quotes from in Genesis 2:23,

**Genesis 2:23** And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man."

Paul’s analogy is that of Adam and Eve, and Christ and the Church. So it is right to say of the Church that we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.

But what does this suggest? We have to go yet further into the mystery. This is like walking into some cave where you see the first chamber, and then see that there is
another opening out of it. You go on into that, and on, and on; and in the most central chamber there is the final treasure.

What did the apostle Paul mean? He depends on the meaning of Genesis 2:23. The answer is that the woman has been taken out of the man. Have you noticed the exact wording of Genesis 2:23?

Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman"

The answer is because she was taken out of Man. The true definition of a woman therefore is, one who has been taken out of man. That is the very meaning of the word woman. Woman by definition, by origin, by name, is one who is taken out of man.

But notice again the way that this done.

Genesis 2:18 And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

And notice what we are told at the end of verse 20,

Genesis 2:20 So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

The animals had been made, and animals are very wonderful, but not one of them is a helper for man. There is an essential difference between man and animal. Man is a special creation after all; he has not evolved out of the animals.

The animal at its best is essentially different even from the man of lowest intelligence: he belongs to a different order, to a different realm altogether. Man is unique; he is made in the image of God. So though the animals are wonderful, there was not one that could make a companion for man, the companion that man needs.

So we go on, and read,

Genesis 2:21-22 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.
Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

Woman is taken out of man, out of his substance, out of his flesh and bones. God takes a part out of man, and of that He makes a woman. So what is woman? She is of the same substance as man, of his flesh, and of his bones.

God performed the operation. Man was put into a state of deep sleep, and then the operation was performed, the part was taken out, and out of that a woman was made.

This mystery is great; but I speak concerning Christ and the church. We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. How? Woman was made at the beginning as the result of an operation that God performed upon man. How does the church come into being? As the result of an operation that God performed upon the Second Man, His only begotten, beloved Son.

A deep sleep fell upon Adam. A deep sleep fell upon the Son of God; He expired; He died; and there in that operation the Church was taken out. So, in a sense as the woman was taken out of Adam, so the Church was taken out of Christ.

The woman was taken out of the side of Adam; and the Church is from Christ's bleeding, wounded side. That is her origin; and so she is indeed, flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bones. This mystery is great! Profound!

It is not an accident that Jesus Christ is referred to in the New Testament as the Second man, Second Adam, or, the Last Adam. The apostle Paul teaches in Ephesians 5 that this is true also of Christ in this respect. We normally think of our relationship to Him in an individual sense, and that is to some extent correct.

Take the teaching concerning the relationship of the Christian to Christ as found in Romans 5 and I Corinthians 15, where you again have this same comparison between the first man and the Second Man; it tells us how on a personal level we are all involved in the transgression of Adam, and how we are involved in the righteous Christ.

Romans 5:14-15 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ,
Romans 5:17 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:45-49 And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

Above in Romans 5, and 1 Corinthians 15, the emphasis is on the personal. In Ephesians 5, it is in terms of the Church as a whole, the communal relationship, the family unity; and this is the great mysterious truth that Paul is teaching.

As it is true to say of the woman, that she was taken out of the side of man, out of the very substance of his flesh and his bones, so the Church is taken out of Christ, and we are a part of Him, members of His body and of His very bones.

Jesus Christ is the Second Adam. He is the Last Adam. And as God operated on the first man, Adam to produce his bride, his helper, so He has operated on the Second Man to produce Christ's Bride, the Church to do the same thing in an infinitely more glorious manner.

**Himself**

But let us go on even further. In Ephesians 5 the apostle Paul is emphasizing that we are a part of Christ's very nature. Notice that he uses the word Himself in Ephesians 5:28.

Ephesians 5:28-29 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.
It is still the same idea! The body is a part of the man, and therefore when he pays attention to his body he is paying attention to himself. He cannot divorce himself from himself. What he does for his body he is doing for himself; he does it because it is a part of himself.

This is the relationship between Christ and the Church. That does not mean we are divine. We must be careful about that. We are Christians, not gods, nor are we divine yet. But what it does mean is that Christ is the forerunner of many glorious sons. The human family started in Adam, a new family starts in Jesus Christ. We are sharers of that! We are partakers of that!

That is why we find the Apostle Peter saying,

**II Peter 1:4** IBy which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.ô

We are partakers of this divine nature that the Mediator now has, because He does the will of His Father. We derive our life, our being from Him, and we are becoming part of Him.

So sacred and so holy is marriage that God uses it as a type of the coming marriage of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to the Church. A wedding is soon to take place. A husband and wife are responsible for forming a union of love, affection, and sharing through a lifetime of experiences together.

Yes, there will be differences of opinion and dismal failures, but all that can be overcome. All that must be overcome. Someone once said, ôA great marriage is not when the perfect couple come together, but rather it is when an imperfect couple learns to enjoy their differencesô

If a husband truly loves his wife as himself, he considers her needs, desires, and opinions first before his own. Let me give you an example of the practical application of this principle, ôHusbands love your wives.ô

Daisy Eyebright was a popular contributor to the "Woman's Page" of the Country Gentleman publication, and was the Emily Post of her time. Eyebright wrote her famous *A Manual of Etiquette, With Hints on Politeness and Good Breeding* in 1884. The manual
is a curious look into Victorian era norms and expectations of good social breeding.

In Chapter 11 under the heading, Husbands, Daisy Eyebright gave advice to new and old husbands alike. I am not advocating that husbands follow all of these guidelines precisely as stated, but that you get a general idea of how a gentleman husband was expected to carry out his marriage responsibilities.

If a dispute upon some subject arises, trifling no doubt, and the wife does not possess sufficient good sense to yield her opinion, and exhibits a determination to have her own way, and that, tenaciously, do not grow angry in your turn, but either waive the subject, or keep silent, and thus let the discussion die out.

Doubtless an opportunity may soon occur when you can return to the matter, if desirable, and speak kindly, yet decidedly, upon it. Then the wife, if she is worthy of your choice, will express her sorrow at the unseemliness of her demeanor; and you will never have cause to regret that you mastered your own temper, and by so doing avoided a quarrel. It is well to remember the old maxim that a quarrel can never walk upon one leg, without a crutch.

And from Chapter 11 under the heading, Wives, she says,

A good temper can be cultivated, although it is a hard task to do so; yet a strong will can curb the fiery passion which surges through the heart; and can keep in hand the prancing, racing, leaping coursers of anger and fury.

There are wives, doubtless, who possess peppered tempers, spiced with cayenne; are fiery furnaces, and when fuel is given to them they wax hotter and hotter, until the fire scorches, and burns with fury. But there are no more fiery-tempered wives than there are husbands, and a good-tempered husband can control a fiery-tempered wife with ease. Being let alone, left to oneself until the fire is reduced to ashy paleness, is the best remedy for this disease, when it shows itself in either sex. A good wife, however, is wisdom, courage, strength, and endurance to a man; while a bad one is confusion, discomfiture, weakness, and despair.

If by chance you marry a man of a hasty temper, you will need great wisdom and discretion to guide you aright, and give you strength to rule your own spirit.
But if you can learn to possess complete command over your own temper, you will be able to decrease the strength of your husband's temper. Govern yourself, and then you will learn how to govern others. Let your conduct be refined, honorable, and free from duplicity; and beware of intrusting to persons outside of your home, the small annoyances and misunderstandings between yourself and your husband.

Confidants are dangerous persons, in every home circle, and many a happy home has been rendered desolate by their agencies.

Daisy Eyebright's points seem somewhat overformal to us today, but remember the evil powers behind the scenes have been influencing and directing western governments on how they want society re-engineered—severely perverting marriage and family relationships.

If you could describe God with just one word, what would it be? The answer, of course, is so simple, yet so meaningful. The apostle John devoted the main thought in one of his letters to what God is. He wrote, in I John 4:8, "God is love."

Love is the one word that tells us above all other words how God thinks and acts. That quality is the basis on which Jesus Christ enters into an eternal relationship with His Church. And it is upon this quality that marriage must be based.

God's law of love is so essential to happiness in marriage that two of the Ten Commandments directly preserve the sanctity of marriage, one forbidding adultery, the other forbidding even the lusting or coveting of another's husband or wife. It is possible to comprehend the importance of marriage only if one follows those laws.

If your marriage grows in love, it becomes a miniature type of the coming spiritual marriage of Christ and the Church. And in the process, you will have the happiest possible marriage.

Now let us take the final step, and go to verses 31 and 32 here in Ephesians 5.

Ephesians 5:31-32 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is great, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.
Here again, we can only understand Paul’s meaning by going back to Genesis 2:24 from where Paul quotes in Ephesians 5:31. Genesis 2:24 contains one of the most insightful and essential statements in the whole Bible concerning God’s plan for marriage. Paul introduces verse 31 at this point to substantiate his case from Scripture, as did Jesus himself. It had already been shaping his thought in this part of his Epistle. The phrase he begins verse 31 with, “For this reason,” is not a preface to the quotation but part of it.

Go back to Genesis 2 and this is what you will find. Adam was originally one, a perfect, a complete man. And yet there was a lack, there was no helper for him. So what we are told is that God performed the operation, and this man who had been one now begins to be two—Adam and Eve, the man and the woman.

One Flesh

Remember, the woman was taken out of man, so she is a part of him; she was not created from nothing as man was. But it did not stop there, and this is where the mystery comes in.

When Adam recognized that Eve was part of himself, "bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh," (as Genesis 2:23 words it), Genesis 2:24 adds:

**Genesis 2:24** Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24 enunciates a more profound truth than was realized till Christ came to purchase His bride, the Church, by giving Himself for her on the cross.

**Ephesians 5:25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

**Ephesians 5:31-32** "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery [This mystery is profound], but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Paul does not add the words, "But I speak concerning Christ and the church," as if he
had been diverted from his theme. Rather, he is saying that as far as he is concerned he refers the mystery to the relationship between Christ and the Church, a mystery in which he himself had been given unusual insight because of the revelation entrusted him. Verse 32 preserves and protects the highest possible view of marriage.

The apostle Paul does not quote unless he has an object and a purpose in quoting. This expression concerning the one flesh applies to the relationship between Christ and the Church as it does to the relationship between the husband and the wife.

In order for the husband and the wife to be truly one flesh, not just physically but spiritually as well, the husband's love for his wife (and vice-versa) must be sacrificial and sanctifying, but it should also be satisfying.

Whatever each does to the other, he does to himself, or herself. It is a mutually satisfying experience. The man who loves his wife is actually loving his own body, since he and his wife are one flesh. As he loves her, he is nourishing her. Just as love is the circulatory system of the body of Christ, so love is the nourishment of the home. How many people have confessed, "I am starved for love"?

There should be no starvation for love in the Christian home, because the husband and wife should love each other that their physical, emotional, and intellectual needs are met. If both are submitted to Christ, and to each other, they will be so satisfied that they will not be tempted to look anywhere else for fulfillment.

Our Christian homes are to be excellent pictures of Christ's relationship to His church. Each believer is a member of Christ's body, and each believer is to help nourish the body in love. We are one with Christ. The church is His body and His bride, and the Christian home is a divinely ordained illustration of this relationship. This certainly makes marriage a serious responsibility.

Paul referred to the creation of Eve and the forming of the first home. Adam had to give part of himself in order to get a bride, but Christ gave all of Himself to purchase His bride. So united are a husband and wife that they are "one flesh." Their union is even closer than that of parents and children. The believer's union with Christ is even closer and, unlike human marriage, will last for all eternity.

But let us be careful because, "This mystery is great." This is a spiritual relationship; this is an extraordinary unity; this is a unique oneness that Paul is talking about. In one sense, they were not two people: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."
The marriage tie takes precedence over every other human relationship and for this reason is to be regarded as sacred. Nevertheless, what is basically a divine ordinance is graciously designed for mutual satisfaction and delight.

joined means closely joined, closely united. The original Greek word literally means, will be glued, and taken in conjunction with the one flesh it refers physically to sexual intercourse, which is thus sanctified by the approval of God Himself.

However, more importantly, spiritually, it is raised to an exalted level. That is the very essence of the mystery. There is a sense in which they are two, and there is a sense in which they are not two. We must never forget this unity, this one-ness, this idea of the one flesh.

Fullness

At this point, let us rise to the pinnacle of the mystery. Adam was incomplete without a helper. And, the deficiency, the lack, was made up by the creation of Eve. So there is a sense in which we can say that Eve makes up the fullness of Adam; makes up that which was lacking in Adam.

And that is exactly what the apostle Paul says about the church in her relationship to Christ. He had already said that in Ephesians 1:23, which reads, beginning in verse 22,

Ephesians 1:22-23 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The Church is more than a body of saints, it is more than the people of God; it expresses the essential union of God's people with Christ (as in the parable of the vine and the branches in John 15). The same life of God flows through all the saints; and it speaks of the whole as functioning in obedience to Him carrying out His work in the world.

This designation of the function of the Church is amplified even further; it is not only Christ's body, it is intended to be, The fullness of Him who fills all in all. It is God's purpose for the Church to be the full expression of Jesus Christ, who Himself fills everything. But that is not all.

Now let us notice something about the biblical use of this word fullness.
Colossians 1:19 and 2:9 speak of all the divine fullness dwelling in Christ Himself, that is to say He is filled by, and is the full expression of deity.

**Colossians 1:19 (ESV)** For in him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

**Colossians 2:9 (ESV)** For in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

In this sense, Christians are intended to be filled with all the fullness of God, that is, to receive the fullness of the attributes and gifts of God that it is possible for people to receive. In this same way, Ephesians 4:13 describes the Christian’s growth to spiritual maturity as development to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So there is no doubt that Christ brings spiritual fullness to the Church, with God being the source in Christ all the fullness of God dwells.

But there is also another sense in which the church fills a reserved place in Christ.

Another interpretation of this “fullness,” understood by many ancient versions in their translation of the Greek, and followed by many commentators, is that in some sense the Church fills Christ, and He is made complete by the Church. This goes back to the reserved place that the Father and His Son have for the Church. The Church has a reserved place, which is not fully occupied right now. It can only be occupied or filled to fullness by the Bride of Christ.

The sense, in which this is meant, is that until Christ is united to the Church in marriage, the Son of God considers Himself in some sense incomplete and unfulfilled. So, in a manner of speaking, the Church makes up this fullness of Christ. And, in Ephesians 5 Paul is just repeating that truth.

As Adam and Eve became one flesh, Eve makes up the fullness of Adam, and similarly, in this specific context, the Church makes up the fullness of Christ. Before we are married, God has placed in each one of us a special place in our heart, reserved for that one person who might fill that emotional void within our heart. Similarly, the Bridegroom and His Bride have a void reserved in their hearts.

In other words, in a primary sense, Christ is the fullness of the church; and also in a
secondary sense, the Bride makes up His fullness—the Bride, the Church, His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all. The Church is the completion, or fullness of His glorious marriage. Without the Church his dominion would not be complete.

A husband and a wife think in these terms concerning one another, and have been known to phrase their feeling of oneness exactly like that: “You complete me!”

**Ephesians 1:22-23** And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

God the Father has made him the Head over His church, that he might rule it as his own body—the whole wide state of his universal kingdom. This is the highest honor of the Church; that the Son of God regards Himself as, in a certain sense, incomplete unless he is joined to us.

The Church constitutes the complete body of the Redeemer. A body is complete when it has all its members and limbs in proper proportions, and those members might be said to be the completion, or the filling-up, or the fullness of the body or the person.

This means that the Church sustains the same relation to Christ that the body does to the head.

It helps to form the entire person and there is a close and necessary union between the body and the head.

The one is not complete without the other. And one is dependent on the other. When the body has all its members in correct proportion, and is in sound and vigorous health, the whole person then is complete and whole.

This is the way it will be in our marriage with Christ. He is the head; and the redeemed Church is the body, the fullness, the completion, the filling-up of the whole Kingdom over which he presides, and which he rules as Supreme King and High Priest under God the Father.

In the ultimate sense, we can look at it in this way: The fullness of Jesus Christ, as the eternal Son of God, is perfect and complete and always has been from all eternity.

**Colossians 2:9-10 ESV** For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,
and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

He is and always has been co-eternal with the Father. There is no lack, there is nothing to make up; there is no fullness that is lacking. However, as the Mediator, in a sense, Christ is not full or whole without the Church.

Jesus Christ as the Mediator will not be full, complete, and whole until every saint has been gathered in, for who He died. It is only then that He will be full, only then will the fullness be complete.

Conclusion

This salvation mystery of Christ and the Church is both profound and great. But the doctrine of salvation suggests that the eternal Son of God, in order to save us, put a limitation, a reservation on Himself. He remains God eternally. There is no limit on that; there is no lessening in His righteousness and godliness.

He was subject to pain and suffering when he became a human being made in the likeness of sinful flesh. And now as Mediator, He will not be complete until the Church is whole. He has a bride to whom He is to be joined, and they become one.

This mystery is great; and we cannot understand it in an ultimate sense in every detail. It cannot be fully understood. But let us notice something that shows a parallel between the marriage of husband and wife and the marriage of Christ and the Church. Remember how the apostle Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 in Ephesians 5,

Ephesians 5:31-33 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The final word in this section is a practical one. Whether or not we fully understand Paul's allusions to the mystery being profound, we should at least grasp the essential instructions he has been trying to express. Paul addresses every husband individually. Literally, in the Greek, the phrase in verse 33 ÓEach one of you in particular,Ó says, ÓYou each, one by one,Ó without naming individual names. Each and every one of we husbands are to go on loving his wife as his very self, in fact, even more than himself;
that is what sacrifice and love is.

The wife for her part is to give her husband the respect that is due him as to the Lord. Such respect is conditioned by and expressed by reverence for Christ. It also assumes that the husband will so love his wife as to be worthy of such esteem.

Those who are puzzled because Paul does not tell wives that they are to love their husbands, fail to appreciate the careful precision with which the analogy is handled. Christ loves the Church; the Church’s love for Christ is expressed in submission and respect.

Let me personalize this for the Church. Jesus Christ left the courts of heaven, and glory, coming into this world for His Bride. There has been a leaving in this case, as in the case of a man who leaves his father and mother so that he may be joined to his bride. So Christ left heaven for the sake of His Bride. There is an awful moment later when He cried out, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ For that moment He was separated from His Father. And why? So that he could purchase and save this Bride of His, who now, as the result of that operation, is a part of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. This mystery is supreme; it is great.

Could there be anything more wonderful, any more glorious than this?

We have been purchased by Him, and we will be joined to Him throughout eternity. We are part of Him, one flesh if you will, with Him. The Church is the Bride of Christ, and as we think of this relationship we must always fix our eyes on this mystery and realize that, “We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.”

But above all let us realize what He did in order that we might become His. He left His Father’s throne above; He humbled Himself; He made Himself of no reputation; and He submitted Himself to God’s will. That is how much He has loved the Church!

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her. Let each one of you husbands in particular so love his own wife as himself. And, let the wife see that she respects her husband.