

## study 5 - ephesians 5:21-6:9



# family matters

Thinking back through Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we've seen the incredible importance he's placed on God's church - that remarkable collection of all kinds of people under Christ. The church is like a body, in which each part does its work - and Christ is the head. More than that, we're reminded in this passage that the church is a beautiful bride - and Christ is the husband. That means the way Christian husbands treat their wives, and the way Christian wives relate to their husbands, is a dramatic visual aid of a far deeper reality. At least, that's the way it should be...

### Some Interesting Statistics

- There were 106,100 marriages in Australia in 1996. In terms of weddings per 1,000 people, this was the lowest rate since 1900. There were 52,500 divorces granted in 1996, the second highest since the record number of 63,230 in 1976 following the introduction of the Family Law Act.
- On average, the marriages that dissolved had lasted 11 years.
- In June 2000 there were 15.2 million people aged 15 years and over in the Australian population, a rise of 14% on 1990. The 2000 population was comprised of 4.9 million never married, 8.3 million married, 932,000 widowed and 1.1 million divorced persons. The largest proportional increase over the past ten years was in the divorced population, increasing by 63% between 1990 and 2000.
- The likelihood of a marriage ending in divorce is increasing. If the 1997-1999 rates for marriage, widowing, divorce, remarriage and mortality were applied to a newly-born group of babies 32% of their marriages would end in divorce. This is an increase on the proportion expected if 1985-1987 rates were applied (28%). (ABS)

### Discuss

Keeping in mind that marriage issues can be painful and sensitive to talk about (so without treading on any toes), why do you think marriage is such hard work these days?

What factors do you think have contributed most to the alarming number of marriages in crisis?

**Now read Ephesians 5:21-6:9.**



### Just to get things in the right perspective...

In spite of the great difficulties faced by 21st century marriages, our romance-saturated culture is still convinced that there's nothing more important than finding the right "life-partner." (Maybe those romantic expectations are part of the problem?) In any case, even though most of the passage we just read is about marriage and family relationships, Paul's main focus is elsewhere.

What's Paul really talking about in verses 22-33?

Given that "Christ and the church" are foremost in Paul's mind, let's concentrate on first things first.

Carefully re-read Ephesians 5:31-32. Note the progression that occurs when a man marries.

How does this progression parallel the mystery of "Christ and the church"? (Filling in the gaps may help...

Leaves \_\_\_\_\_ to be \_\_\_\_\_ with wife and become \_\_\_\_\_ with her

Leaves \_\_\_\_\_ to be \_\_\_\_\_ with church and become \_\_\_\_\_ with us

It's not a perfect parallel, but it's enough for Paul to make his point. Just as a man leaves his place of origin and is united with his new wife, so Christ has left the Father and become "one flesh" with us, the church. (You may like to see the way Paul expresses the same idea in Philippians 2:1-11, or how John puts it in John 1:1-18.)

The thought of Christ leaving his Father in Heaven and becoming one with us in our humanity provides a powerful motivation for every area of our Christian lives, and especially our thinking about "church."

a) From verse 23, what three terms are used to describe Christ's relationship to the church?

Christ is \_\_\_\_\_ of the church

The church is his \_\_\_\_\_

Christ is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the church

b) How should the church respond to the one who is her head and saviour (from verse 24)?

How would this look in practice? Can you think of counter examples, ie, churches that don't appear to demonstrate this attitude?

c) What is Christ's attitude to his church? How do we know? (v25)

What was Christ's goal in giving himself up for the church?

How is the church going to look when she is presented to Christ?

Can you see signs of that holiness developing in our own church?





## Be Part of Something Beautiful

The idea of the church as Christ's bride also appears in the book of Revelation - first in Revelation 19, then in the culminating scene of Revelation 21. While many Christians think Revelation is a difficult book to understand, if you read it as a series of "word pictures" you'll soon get the idea. And if you've ever been to a wedding, you'll see that this is a word picture with plenty of impact...

### *Revelation 19*

<sup>6</sup>Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

"Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

<sup>7</sup>Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

<sup>8</sup>Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

<sup>9</sup>Then the angel said to me, "Write:

"Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" "

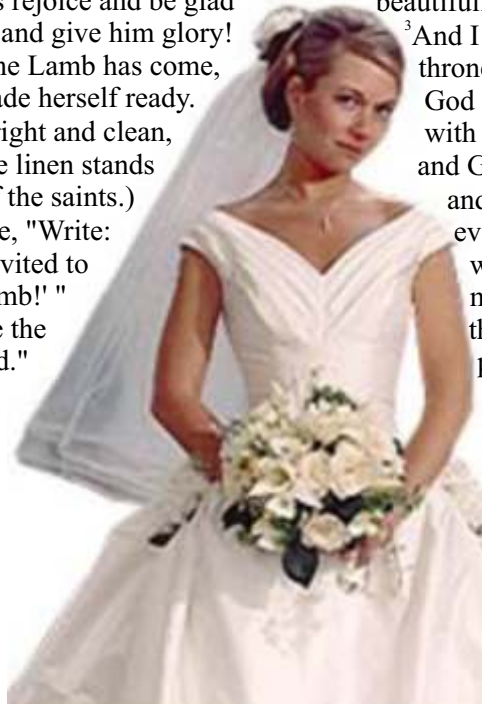
And he added, "These are the true words of God."

### *Revelation 21*

<sup>1</sup>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup>I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

<sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

<sup>5</sup>He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."



## Here comes the bride...

- a) From Revelation 19, what does the bride of Christ look like?
- b) Just so you don't think the book of Revelation is too difficult to decode, what does the "fine linen" of her bridal dress actually represent?
- c) Revelation 21 pictures the renewed bride processing down the aisle to her waiting husband. How is she described?

### What sort of church do YOU want to be part of?

Do you want to be part of a really big church? Do you want to be part of a really up to date church? Do you want to be part of a really musical church? What you should be longing for is to be part of a really **beautiful** church. And the good news is, that's exactly the future we're heading for. In the meantime, we're "dressing for the wedding," **putting on** the fine linen of the "righteous acts of the saints" that has been given to us to wear. (Paul makes a similar point back in Ephesians 2:9-10)

- a) Have you seen any evidence of this sort of beauty in our own church?
- b) How do you need to change to make our church more "beautiful"?



## Family Matters

The image of Christ and his church-bride is the foundation of Paul's instructions for our own marriages and families.

- a) From 5:21, what overarching attitude will all family members have, and why?
- b) From verses 22 to 24, what model is the Christian wife to imitate?
- c) What practical "fears" are generated by the idea of wives "submitting" to husbands?

The feminist movement of the late 20th century would recoil at the words of verse 22. In the light of what we saw in verse 21, how will all Christians differ from movements that are based on demanding rights?

On the other hand, it's easy to confuse the words of verses 22-24 with an endorsement of the harsh patriarchal marriages so common in the 1950s. So let's take a moment to look at the role of husbands.

- c) What model is the Christian husband to imitate?

How was Christ's love for the church demonstrated?

What will this mean in practical terms for Christian husbands?

What was Christ's goal for his church-bride?

What will this mean in practical terms for Christian husbands?

Christ has "united himself" with his church by becoming one of us. Likewise, husband and wife become "one flesh." What are the practical implications of this one-ness according to verse 28?

- d) What would a marriage built on these principles look like?

What "divorce protection" is built in to this marriage model?

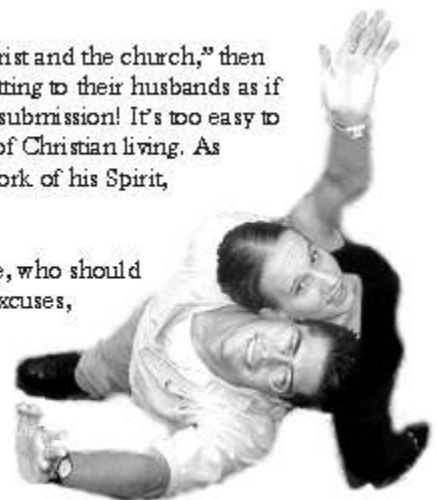
Voluntary submission sounds scary. What will help?

What would a Christ-like husband be desiring in his wife?

## Get Real!

It sounds too good to be true. If our marriages are going to be models of "Christ and the church," then husbands will be giving themselves up for their wives, and wives will be submitting to their husbands as if they were Christ! Obviously, the more Christ-like the husband, the easier the submission! It's too easy to dismiss this picture as being unrealistic. But that's to abandon the entire goal of Christian living. As God's holy people, we're expected to be growing in Godliness... and by the work of his Spirit, we're able to make progress.

If you're a Christian couple and your marriage doesn't reflect the ideal picture, who should make the first move? The answer is simple. The HUSBAND. Stop making excuses, and start imitating Jesus, who loved us and gave himself for us, before we did ANYTHING to deserve it!



## The best thing a dad can do...

In many ways, our culture is kid-centric. We'd do almost anything for our kids - we spend hundreds of dollars on their Christmas presents, and thousands to ensure a top quality education. As Christians, we're typically even more family focused. It's perhaps something of a surprise, then, to see how little space is devoted to the tricky task of Christian child-raising. Maybe the basic principles are simpler than we think?

Read Ephesians 6:1-4.

According to verse 4, what is the single best thing a dad can do for his kids?

If you're a dad, be honest. In what ways have you done this with your kids?

Why, or why not?

What's hard about it?

How can you do it better?

What's surprising about the first half of verse 4?



In a typical family situation, kids exasperate and anger their parents. Paul says, take a look at the other side of the coin! Work on ways of interacting with your kids that doesn't anger and frustrate them. This may take some thought!

## And a word to kids

If you're a Christian kid, what's expected of you according to Ephesians 6:1?

Why is obedience difficult?

What will it mean for you to "honour" your Father and Mother?

At what age can you stop doing this?

Why will it "go well with you" if you honour your parents?



For years, Hollywood has given the message that parents are not worth respecting. Parents are dull and outdated, teenagers are meant to rebel, and kids know best. But Paul says the opposite... make your parents your "heroes."

Imagine a family where the dad's main ambition for his kids is not that they have a great education and lots of toys, but that they're not frustrated and exasperated, and that they do know the Lord Jesus. Imagine a family where the kids are obedient, and actually respect their parents. Too good to be true? No - just a family that's serious about living out their faith. And that's what we should all be aiming for.

## Workplace Harmony

Read Ephesians 6:5-9. There probably isn't time to talk about these verses in detail in your group, but reflect on how the principles of verse 6 and 7 could transform not only your workplace, but every part of your life.

**Food for thought...** If this study has raised some tough issues for you in the areas of marriage and family life, talk it through with a member of the ministry team, or a trusted Christian friend.