

Problem-Solving Chapters of the Bible

MARRIAGE PROBLEMS: Ephesians 5

Many people think that marriage is a complicated thing. No one needs to tell us that folks today have problems keeping their marriages happy. However the fact is that marriage is not that complex, and that the solving of marriage problems is not even *hard* when husband and wife really *want* to solve them. The key is understanding that God must be involved if a marriage is really to work. Have you noticed that Biblical morals are called “family values”? Obedience to God helps a marriage and a family, and sin hurts the home. There really is a connection between God and happy marriages. Nowhere in the Bible is this more clear than in Ephesians 5. The fifth chapter of the book of Ephesians also shows us how to solve marriage problems. See how it applies to your situation. Solving any marital difficulty involves addressing one or more of these four other problems.

I. Problems with God (verses 1 through 20).

The section of Chapter 5 that describes Christian marriage begins with verse 18.

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”

This verse not only begins the section about marriage, but it also comes at the end of the section about the new life in Christ. That part of Ephesians begins in Chapter 4, verse 17. It tells us to “walk not as other Gentiles walk,” but to “put off concerning the former conversation the old man” (v. 22) and “put on the new man” (v. 24). This yielding to Christ is called being “filled with the Spirit” in Chapter 5, verse 18, and it sets the stage for a good marriage (verses 19 through 33). God is going to ask a man and a woman to assume roles and make sacrifices that will be contrary to their human nature. They will both need to be filled with God’s Spirit to make marriage work the way it’s supposed to work. Therefore the first thing to do when addressing marital problems is to consider if you are having problems with God. Are you a Spirit-filled Christian?

A. Are you a believer in Jesus Christ?

Ephesians 1:12-14 says that when you trust (believe) in Christ for your soul’s salvation, you are “sealed” with the Holy Spirit as the “earnest” (down payment) of your heavenly home. The presence of God’s Spirit in your life from the moment of your salvation makes a big difference in your life, and makes it possible for you to be “filled with the spirit” (controlled by God within you). When you are sealed with the Spirit, God comes to live inside. When you are filled with the Spirit, He is running your life.

B. Have you renounced the sinful life?

This is what is meant by the admonition in Ephesians 4 to “put off . . . the old man” (v. 22) and “put on the new man” (vs. 24). To be controlled by the Spirit, we must deny our fleshly lusts. Specifically, Ephesians 5 tells us to put off sins related to wrongful sex (vs. 1-12) and the sin of drinking alcoholic beverage (vs. 13-18). All wrong sex activities (“fornication, and all uncleanness . . . filthiness . . . foolish talking . . . jesting . . .”) are harmful to your marriage as well as to your fellowship with God! So is every form of intoxication.

C. Have you yielded to God’s control?

Verses 18 through 21 not only tell us to let God’s Spirit control our lives, but they also tell us what the immediate results of being Spirit-filled will be: joy (v. 19), gratitude (v. 20), and submission (v. 21). The change that comes when a soul is saved, or when a Christian surrenders all to God, brings the power that makes an ideal marriage possible. Are you saved and spirit-filled?

II. Problems with Yourself.

Verse 21 is very important to the Bible ideal of marriage

“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”

Look at it carefully. It tells us to put God first, and to put the other person ahead of yourself. The main cause of marriage problems is *selfishness*. Some say that strife over finances, adultery, drinking, physical abuse, or illicit drugs are the causes, but, when you think about it, you can see that all of these wrongs are actually just different expressions of selfishness! When your marriage is aimed at meeting the other person’s needs, your own needs are fulfilled. When you start worrying about whether or not your spouse is meeting your needs, the marriage starts to

break down. *Unselfishness* is an absolute requirement for happy marriage. You become unselfish when you are filled with God's Spirit (connect verses 18 and 21). Put God first in your life and marriage, and then live to serve the other. That's good Christianity, and good marital philosophy! A useful way to express the three-way partnership of Christian marriage (God, man, woman) is to have regular husband-wife prayer times. Praying together makes real the idea that God is first, and serving each other is the goal.

III. Problems with Your Role.

Ephesians 5:22-23 teaches that marriage is really a *divine drama*, and that husband and wife play roles. When you know your part, and work at acting it out, you start succeeding at marriage! It's as simple as that. The drama is about the greatest love story of all, Christ's love for His people (the church). As you see, the husband plays Christ, and the wife plays the church. Each of them has just *one thing* to do to fulfill his or her role. Notice these 5 things.

A. Husbands and wives have different roles.

A husband is not a male wife, and a wife is not a female husband. The Bible never uses the generic term "mates" to speak of husbands and wives. The man and the woman have very different although complementary job descriptions. Bible marriage is not a 50-50 proposition. It is a 100-100 relationship. Each must give 100% to playing his role!

B. Husband and wives should pay attention to fulfilling their own roles!

Notice that verse 22 is addressed to wives, and that verse 25 is addressed to husbands. Wives are not told what their husbands should be doing, and husbands are not told what to expect of their wives. Each is told to concentrate on what he or she should do in the marriage. This is very important. You must say, "With God's help, I will fulfill my role whether or not my spouse fulfills his or her role."

C. The wife's part is *voluntary submission* (vs. 22-24).

Marriage is not a master-slave relationship, but it is a senior-partner/junior-partner connection. Any two-way partnership will experience the problem of deadlock, and tie votes unless one of the partners is brain-dead, or unless a system is in place to brake the tie! The marriage of two Spirit-filled Christians will hopefully experience mostly unanimous decisions when decisions must be made. However, the wife must go into the marriage with a commitment to God that, in cases of disagreement, she will allow her husband to make the final decision. That's the way it works. The voluntary submission of the wife to the husband is essential to an ideal marriage.

D. The husband's part is *sacrificial love* (vs. 25-28).

A woman has no trouble submitting to a husband that habitually sacrifices himself for her. She should think, "I don't always agree with my husband, but I know that, when he makes decisions, he always has my best interests in mind." The husband is called the wife's "*savior*" in verse 23. Men must play the role of a deliverer and protector all their married lives, if their marriages are to flourish. Verses 26 and 27 make it clear that to be a husband is to minister to the needs of the wife, and through this ministry, to make her better and happier.

E. To pay our roles, we must be unselfish.

It goes back to verse 21, which sends us back to verse 18. Are you having a problem being what the Bible says a husband or wife is to be?

IV. Problems with the Plan.

Verses 29 through 33 remind us that the original plan for marriage given in Genesis 2 calls for the "*two*" to become "*one*." Married people must all their lives strive for this unity. The *roles* tend toward marital unity. The *submission* of verse 21 calls for it. In other words, we must *try* to merge mind, soul, and body with the one we marry. Ephesians 4 admonishes us to work for loving, truthful speech (vs. 15 and 25), for "*edifying*" communication (v. 29), for kindness and forgiveness (vs. 30-32). All of these things work for unity. Do you have a problem with the plan? Are you refusing to give the kindness, unselfishness, and forgiveness a good marriage requires?