House Church Series, Lesson 14 Study Guide

LOVE AND RESPECT

Ephesians 5:21–33

Key Verse: 5:33

In this study we want to learn how to build unity between a husband and wife. According to Ephesians 5:33, husbands need to learn how to love their wives, and wives need to learn how to respect their husbands.

Recent studies have shown that the divorce rate among Evangelicals is the same or even slightly higher than among the population at large. It shows how much Christian families today are being influenced by cultural trends rather than by God’s word. Although in our culture divorce is a viable option, according to the Bible and the clear teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, couples should be united (Mk10:6–9; Mal2:16). However, in the cases of those who have failed in marriage, we Christians are called to be merciful and compassionate (Mt5:7; Jas2:13; 1Pe3:8).

The question is how to build unity in a marriage. This is challenging first of all because men and women are fundamentally very different. Added to this basic gender difference, many couples come from different socio-economic, ethnic, educational and cultural backgrounds. They also have different characters, and some have strong self-centered tendencies, which makes building unity especially problematic. Finally, perhaps the strongest detriment to unity in marriage is each person’s sinful nature.

In addition to these differences, many couples have certain expectations of one another. Wives expect their husbands to be like their father, and husbands expect their wives to be like their mother. But both are usually in the process of growing in maturity. Some try to change each other, but that never really works. When their expectations are not met, the relationship tends to break down. Over time, couples develop a list of grievances against one another and feel entitled to treat each other in negative or derogatory manners. Soon, they either end the marriage or merely cohabit without a real meaningful relationship.

Another challenge people face in building unity in marriage is the baggage they bring from their past. Many have grown up in broken homes that have left them wary of marriage. Many have been in previous relationships that have left them wounded and broken. Others may have developed bad habits, such as pornography addictions, which have distorted the image of God in them. Some have become confused about their gender, for a variety of reasons, and engaged in amoral behavior. Some enter into marriage hiding some things from their past, which further damages marital unity. If we ignore our past wounds, we cannot be healed and are unable to develop a healthy marriage relationship.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace we have been saved (Eph2:4–5). Christ became our Savior, who loved us and gave himself up for us to make us holy (Eph5:23,25–26). If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! (2Co5:17) We must live by faith in this truth. However, inner healing takes time. We all need to keep coming to the cross of Jesus for his forgiving grace. As we keep coming to his cross, we find that “by his wounds you have been healed” (1Pe2:24). Now we live every day by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us (Gal2:20). This grace of Jesus gives us hope for ourselves, hope to have a happy, healthy marriage, and hope for our spouse. As both partners in a married relationship keep living by faith in Jesus, they have hope to achieve a unity that glorifies him.

In Ephesians 5:21–33 Apostle Paul teaches that the relationship between husbands and wives is not conditional, but part of God’s plan to bring all things to unity under Christ. Unconditional unity in marriage requires practicing Christ-like love and respect. For husbands, this means that they should love their wives not because they are lovable, but fundamentally in imitation of Christ who gave himself up for his church. For wives, this means that they should respect their husbands, not because they are respectable, but as the church reveres Christ and submits to him in love.

The principles in Ephesians 5:21–33 guide us in overcoming all these differences and problems and give us practical wisdom in building up couples that are truly united in Christ.

Many people, when studying Ephesians 5:21–33, tend to use the Bible verses to teach their spouse of the opposite gender what they should be doing—husbands tell their wives to submit, wives tell their husbands to love them. But the proper way of studying these verses is to hear what God is saying to us personally, and, to find our own repentance topics before God.

Question 1 deals with a wife’s submission to her husband. In this question we’d like to explore what a Christian woman’s submission to her husband really means, and why she should do so. It is because the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the Head of the church. A woman’s submission in marriage is not a kind of slavery or oppression, but a submission of love and deep respect. A wife’s submission is not merely to her husband, but to Christ her Lord and Savior. Women can learn from the church’s submission to Christ how to submit to their own husbands.

Questions 2 and 3 deal with a husband’s love for his wife. Many husbands need a drastic paradigm shift, to think not about how their wives should respect and serve them, but rather, how they should be loving and serving their wives. Christ himself is a husband’s role model. As Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, husbands must love their wives with self-sacrificing and endless love. They must think about how to make their wives spiritually radiant and holy. They can do this especially by giving them the word of God (5:26b). They must learn to think of their wives as their own body, and feed and care for them.

Question 4 addresses the unity that is crucial in a Christian marriage. This unity is based on God’s original creation truth that a husband and wife be united into one flesh (Ge2:24). This unity is built as both the husband and wife leave their birth family and commit to their new family in God. This unity of a man and woman in marriage is revealed in the profound mystery of the unity between Christ and the church (5:32). The unity of an individual marriage is not theirs alone, but is related to God’s greater plan to bring all things together in unity under Christ.

Question 5 summarizes the fundamental building blocks of marital unity: love and respect. As a husband learns how to love his wife and a wife learns how to respect her husband, the couple builds a spiritual unity in Christ. This unity allows God to be present in their married lives (Mt18:20) and makes them a blessing to their children and to all the people around them.