
Marriage in the Cosmic Plan of God

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God invented marriage to display the power of the gospel. He created marriage to broadcast the love of his Son for his bride and to broadcast the submission of the church to his beloved Son. But like an unhatched chick inside a dark egg, this Christ-revealing meaning behind marriage was hidden inside a shell for thousands of years. The mystery was conceived when Adam took Eve as his bride, and the mystery was revealed when Christ burst from the stone tomb and ascended into heaven.

Because marriage figures prominently into God's plan, Christian husbands and Christian wives play a unique role in the storyline God has written. This storyline is majestically wrapped into a massive cosmic vision of God's ultimate purposes in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians. To see marriage in this broader scope we must first see the panorama of Paul's theology in Ephesians.¹

Overview

To that end, this article has a threefold purpose. First, I sketch out four important theological pillars in Ephesians that highlight the cosmic importance of Christ's death and resurrection. Second, I illustrate how those four theological themes set up and sustain the marriage passage in 5:22–33. Finally, I conclude by drawing the theology and application together into one cohesive vision statement about how Paul's letter to the Ephesians reveals to us the role of marriage within the cosmic work of Christ.

Four Theological Pillars

In order to understand the marriage passage in Eph 5:22–33, and ultimately in order to understand our own marriages, we must see four theo-

logical themes that Paul has interwoven through the entire letter:

- (1) Christ has defeated the cosmic powers of evil to become the focal point of everything.
- (2) Christ has inaugurated a new creation.
- (3) Christ is now restoring first creation patterns.
- (4) Christ is now restoring the relational harmony unraveled by the chaos and discord of sin.

This four-part cluster of Christology will set the stage for understanding our own marriages later in this article. Before we apply these theological points to marriage, I first want to detail each theme as they develop in Ephesians.

(1) Christ has defeated the comic powers of evil to become the focal point of everything.

In his death and resurrection, Christ has triumphed over the cosmic forces of evil, and has ascended to the place of Lord over all creation. He has conquered and he is now bringing all the chaos of this fallen creation into subjection to himself, which is to say that Christ has become the focal point of the universe. All things must now be measured in relation to Christ: either *in* and *under* Christ, or *separated* from Christ. This is one of the grand themes of Ephesians.

Ephesians begins and ends within a massive, cosmic scope (1:9–10; 6:10–13). The context for this book is larger than marriage and larger than the local church. Ephesians encompasses the entire creation. In his death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ has become the nucleus of the cosmos. Everything in heaven and earth must orient to him

and under him (1:9–10). These two verses are essential for understanding the entire book and reveal “God’s full plot” for the created universe.² Christ can begin the work of ordering, or re-creating, the world because he has defeated the cosmic powers of evil and broken sin’s tight grip.³ Therefore the created cosmos, once only fallen and splintered and chaotic because of sin, is now being put in order. In part, this reordering is revealed as sinners are reconciled to God through the blood of Christ (see Col 1:20).

Paul frequently returns in his letter to the victory of Christ over evil (1:20–23; 2:5–6; 3:10; 6:12). Christ’s victory over evil is the supreme example of a long history of God’s victories over evil throughout the Old Testament. Paul quotes from Psalm 68 to make this connection (4:8). God’s miraculous deliverance in the Exodus and his victory over the Canaanites remind Paul of the decisive work of Christ. “By his death on the cross, Christ has met the big enemies of sin, Satan, and death and has utterly routed them.”⁴ Christ has taken the victor’s position over the cosmos. He came to defeat evil—and he won decisively (3:10; 4:8–10).

Especially when 1:10 is read in light of these passages, it becomes clear that God in the victory of Christ has begun to eschatologically harness the sin-twisted chaos in the cosmos. Christ is the terminating point of everything; it is by Christ that everything else is now measured. Believers submit to him willingly and are united into Christ, and thus are properly oriented to him (1:11–18). The church is oriented *under* him and *over* the cosmos (1:19–23). And the church now gathers to stand in awe of this cosmic plan of God that is revealed in the death and resurrection of Christ (3:14–21).

At the same time, Christ’s victory speaks to the end of evil. In the end, all chaos, all the wickedness of rebel sinners, all the angels, even death itself, will be completely subject to Christ (willingly or unwillingly). When the entire cosmos has been brought under Christ, and when order is once again brought to creation, Christ will subject it and himself to God (see 1 Cor 15:23–28). Paul’s point in Ephesians is to demonstrate that Christ has already won the victory over evil in his death

and resurrection. Christ is now the nucleus of the cosmos, and like the North Pole, all things must now orient to him, including husbands and wives.

(2) *Christ has inaugurated a new creation.*

As we have already discovered, the Apostle Paul does not limit the work of Christ in the gospel to bringing about individual salvation. For Paul, the gospel comes to the world in cosmic proportions, the death and resurrection of Christ alter the course of world history, and this cosmic unfolding of the gospel affects everything Paul writes.

Paul views history in two very distinct periods of time, or two orders of existence: (1) *The old aeon*, the age “in Adam” that includes the beginning of sin and the fall, and the curse on creation. This *old aeon* continues into the present and finally ends when Christ returns and all of creation is fully re-created. (2) *The new aeon*, or the new creation “in Christ,” is the age begun and inaugurated in Christ’s death and resurrection. It marks the beginning of the re-creation of the cosmos, a reality that has already begun in the “new creation” believers in the church, and an age that will come to full expression when Christ returns (see Revelation 19–22).

By his finished work, and particularly his resurrection, Christ has ushered in a new aeon that is set at odds against the old aeon of sin, rebellion, and death. This new aeon is evidenced by the long-awaited arrival of the Holy Spirit. To be in the old aeon is to be spiritually dead and dominated by sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil. To be in the new aeon is to have justification, spiritual life, and freedom from sin (see Rom 6:1–14).

The dawning of the new aeon in Christ is at the very heart of Paul’s entire theology.⁵ And at this present time in redemptive history we find the old aeon and the new aeon co-existing side-by-side in ongoing tension. Everyone belongs to one aeon or the other.

The tension between aeons hits close to home for the Ephesians (and for all of us). All non-Jews (Gentiles) were once among the walking dead of the old aeon, futile in mind, blinded by sin, alienated to God, sons of disobedience, children of wrath, blinded by Satan, and headed for judgment

along with the whole fallen realm (2:1–3; 4:17–19). But God intervened. In Christ he saved us from the old aeon. We were united to Christ, we were raised with him, and we are now citizens of his new aeon (2:4–6). Christians now belong to the new aeon by the fact that we are “in Christ” (no longer “in Adam”). In Christ, every Christian has experienced a definitive breach with the old aeon. We have laid aside our old man. We have put on the new man of the new aeon (4:20–24). Or to use stronger language, in Christ we *are* “new creation” (2:10, 15; 4:23–24; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).

Therefore, Christians are called to walk as resurrected “children of the light,” not children of the old aeon of darkness (5:7–10, 14). Spiritually, we are citizens of the new aeon. But we find sin within us, and we groan for the day when we shall be physically raised from the dead and totally set free from all sin (see Rom 8:18–25). Until that day we are learning to act consistently with this new self (4:17–24).⁶

So much of the new aeon is unconsummated that we have much to look forward to when Christ returns (1:14; 1:21; 2:7; 4:30; 5:5, 27; 6:8, 13). Yet Paul assumes that the new aeon has begun already, and Christians have been transferred from the old aeon into the new aeon (see Col 1:13). The arrival of the new aeon does not negate the need for Christians to pursue maturity (4:23), nor does it eliminate all our sin temptation. This “aeon transfer” helps to make sense of our temptations. In our spiritual immaturity we are perpetually lured to live as though we are citizens of the old aeon (see Rom 6:1–23)!

We find ourselves at a strange point in redemptive history. The old aeon (that is passing away), and the new aeon (that will be consummated at the return of Christ), now co-exist. We who are in the new aeon remain tempted by the empty allurements of the old aeon, and especially toward discord-causing sins like racism and selfishness, sins that wreck relationships and split churches and sink marriages.

(3) Christ is now restoring first creation patterns.

The new age inaugurated in Christ is nothing

less than God’s chosen means to restore the cosmos to His original pre-fall design. Christ has come to redeem the world from the fall, and in that way the redemption of humanity and the redemption of the cosmos go hand-in-hand (see Rom 8:22–23). When Adam and Eve rebelled, Satan and cosmic evil and humanity joined forces to destroy the original intentions of the Creator. Redemption in Christ is a return to Eden and a picking up of God’s original plan in creation.⁷

In Ephesians, Paul returns to the language of the Old Testament to show how Christ’s work is nothing short of creation restoration.⁸ One of the most prominent references connects back to Adam. God created Adam, and therefore all humanity, to have dominion over creation, a profound point made by Psalm 8. Sin brought about the curse, and the plan was disrupted from this original design (see Gen 3:14–19). No longer could Adam control the chaos of the sin-cursed creation. Then Christ appeared. In his life and death and resurrection, Christ assumed the Adamic role over creation. Paul alludes to Ps 8:6 in Eph 1:22 to make the connection. Christ took his place over creation in a way that God intended for Adam. In that sense Christ became the Second Adam over creation, proving once again that Christ has become the focal point of the cosmos, but also revealing that the new aeon is nothing short of a return to God’s original pattern for creation.

This restoration is made clear in other areas in Ephesians, like in God’s design for unity to flourish among all people and among all nations. This unity was fractured even before the first couple could reproduce. And God later instituted the Mosaic Law as a means to separate his chosen people (Israel) from the Gentile nations. In this way God could expose sin for what it was, he could mark a remnant of faith-filled believers in the Old Testament, and he could protect the Messianic seed from the surrounding paganism until the time was right for Christ to be born into the world. The Law, for all its good and benefit, was needed because of sin. But the Law also worked as a concrete barrier between the Jews and the alien Gentile nations. It was a useful separation, but it also prevented

unity among the nations. One of the major themes in Ephesians is that Christ fulfilled the Law, and by this Christ abolishes the God-ordained separation that was necessary (2:13–17).

Besides these passages, there are other cues that Ephesians is given to a restoration of the intention of the Creator, and especially that the sanctification of a Christian's life is the restoration of God's design for Adam and Eve's pre-fall holiness and reflection of God's purity (1:4; 2:10; 4:20–24; 5:1; see Col 3:10). By his death and resurrection, Christ seeks to restore the image of God in mankind. The holiness that God expects to see in the lives of his children is nothing short of the holiness he intended to be reflected in the lives of Adam and Eve before the fall. In this new aeon, sin's power is broken so God's children can begin to reflect the holiness of God that Adam and Eve were intended to reflect.

Paul will return to this theme of redemption in Christ, and describe it as nothing less than a restoration of the first creation, when he speaks of God's design for marriage.

(4) Christ is now restoring the relational harmony unraveled by the chaos and discord of sin.

The harmony between the nations laid out in the Old Testament is beginning to be materialized (see Isa 66:18–23). In Christ, God's plan for this ethnic reconciliation is manifested in the church. The church is the focal point in which Christ is reconciling, gathering, and orienting the nations to himself.

The perfect work of Christ restores this relational harmony. Christ abolishes the law, removing the barrier that separated Jews and Gentiles, thus forming together one new man from the two, bringing peace between them and a holy God (Eph 2:11–3:6). In this way Christ populates the church, a church that proclaims in its unity the cosmic victory of Christ (3:7–13).

Or (as Ephesians 5 puts it) when sinners repent, they are restored to God, they become citizens of the new aeon, they are given the Holy Spirit, and they willingly take their place in the church (the Second Eve), which in turn is submitted to Christ (the Second Adam).

A particular mark of the victory of Christ is seen in church unity. For the sake of maturity in unity, Christ gives a diversity of gifts to the church (4:7–16). We need these gifts because Christians in the church are still maturing. We are still tempted by the sinful thinking of the old aeon, and as a result we are called to wage warfare against the sins that bring discord (4:11–16). This unity among God's people must be fought for, and the disunity of the powers of the old aeon must be battled against (6:10–20).

Our relationships must not conform to the dark and splintering old aeon. We are not to steal or lie, hold grudges, or speak to one another with filthy jokes or corrupting speech. These things destroy relational harmony and show one to be outside of the new aeon (5:5). Rather, in Christ, we are to build others up with our words, speak the truth in love, voice thankfulness, forgive one another, show tenderness and kindness, gather and sing together, and grow the church together in unity (4:15–5:21).

This relationship-restoring power of the gospel is the overarching theme of Ephesians. Christ has come to address the fragmented nature of fallen humanity and to heal the separation of Jew and Gentile. This gospel is so big it addresses all levels of fractured relationships—ethnic divisions, local church divisions, and divisions and disharmony in marriage.⁹

Thirteen Proposed Implications For Our Marriages

The plan of God in Christ that Paul builds in Ephesians is breathtaking. But what does it have to do with my marriage? Once we begin to get our heads around this cosmic big-picture plan of God, the place of marriage begins to make sense. What follows are several implications from these theological trajectories that lay a foundation for what Paul says about marriage in Eph 5:22–33.

(1) Marriage was originally created by God to proclaim the mystery of Christ and the church.

In no other letter does Paul talk more about the *μυστήριον*—the “mystery.” He uses this term six times (1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19). So what is

this mystery? In short, the four points above are part of the mystery. The mystery is the full scope of Christ's cosmic-shaping work for and in the church. It also means the beginning of the new creation has arrived. Marriage participates in the mystery by illustrating the union of Christ and his bride, a union so close it had never been put in such one-flesh language before (5:32).

The union between Christ and the church is the mystery, and marriage union between a man and a woman is God's chosen mechanism for broadcasting the mystery to the world.¹⁰ But for marriage to accurately broadcast this mystery, marriage must first be liberated from the twistedness of the old aeon of sin; it must be redeemed to its original design in creation. This liberation requires marriages to be populated by new aeon Spirit-filled men and women who are rightly oriented to Christ. Christ inaugurated the new aeon to save husbands and wives and to orient them to himself in order to create marriages that broadcast this Christ-church union to the world and to our neighborhoods. In the end, Christ died for the church, and the church submits to Christ, a beautiful picture God intended to proclaim to the entire cosmos. Godly marriages broadcast this *mystery*.

(2) The gospel aims to restore God's original design for marriage.

In the fall, God's original design for social harmony was broken. Man was created to submit to God, woman was created to submit to and help the man, and the animal world was created to submit to man and woman. In the fall this is all gets twisted backwards. The woman yields to the creature, man yields to the woman, and nobody yields to God.¹¹ It is within this twisted distortion of God's original design that social harmony is shattered and the old aeon begins. But will God turn his back on this cosmic mutiny?

As we have seen in Ephesians, the answer is *no*. Christ, the Second Adam, gives up his life to inaugurate the new aeon, which aims to restore the original creation (and ultimately to usher in a superior re-creation¹²). This restoration stands in brilliance when Scripture brings us back into

the marriage context to see what a restored marriage should look like. Here the divinely instituted hierarchy is restored. It took nothing less than the inauguration of the new aeon for human history to return to a pattern of marriage that God intended.

So if we find it hard to discover the meaning and proper structuring of marriage when we look at culture, that's to be expected. Every culture in the old aeon will find creative ways to distort the covenant model of marriage. Right now the culture drifts towards so-called "same-sex marriage." This distortion and others like it are not new. But however twisted marriage becomes in the old aeon between the fall and the moment when marriage was culturally defined for the Ephesians in popular Greco-Roman household codes, and whatever has happened to marriage for us in the past fifty years, God's intention is clear through Paul. The original pattern for the first husband and wife matters. It matters so much that Christ died to restore marriage.

Therefore, we are wise to distinguish between marriage that is twisted in the old aeon and marriage that is redeemed in the new aeon. Spirit-filled marriages can taste again what God intended for Adam and Eve.¹³ Which means that the Romans did not invent male headship in the home. American traditionalism did not institute a wife's submission to her husband. And the fall did not create the headship of the husband or submission of a wife. God created complementarian marriage before sin, and the Second Adam came to restore that original design. "The redemption we anticipate at the coming of Christ is not the dismantling of the created order of loving headship and willing submission, but a *recovery* of it."¹⁴

(3) Christ died, rose, disarmed cosmic evil, and inaugurated the new aeon to restore relational harmony to husbands and wives.

The original design of marriage was botched by sin. Christ died and rose to defeat the twistedness of the old aeon and to restore relational harmony. What is true of this harmony in the church is expected to be true between a Christian husband and a Christian wife. There is no closer human relationship than the one-flesh relationship of

a husband and wife in covenant union, and God uses this unity to broadcast the closeness of the church's union with Christ.

If there is a cosmic defeat of the splintered humanity, and if there is a Spirit-filling of redeemed hearts, this will show itself in a harmonious complementary marriage. This is not to condemn marriage conflict. Every Christian is learning to put off the sin of the old aeon, and occasional marriage conflict plays an important role in the process of personal sanctification. Still, marital harmony reveals the cosmic plan of God in bringing sinners together in the new aeon. If there is any hope of a joy-filled and harmonious marriage, if there is any protection from self-focused and splintering divorce, it is to be found in the Christ who inaugurates the new aeon to restore marriage relationships to their proper order by ordering them all under himself.

(4) The church in Ephesus was a household (2:19), indicating that when Paul addresses marriage he addresses the church in microcosm.

When Paul talks about the home in Eph 5:22–6:9 he is “laying out a manifesto for the New Humanity, painting in broad strokes a vision for how believers ought to conduct themselves in new creation communities, thus epitomizing the triumph of God in Christ.”¹⁵ The complementary harmony in the home is nothing short of a picture of Christ's cosmic victory. That is true because marriage is a microcosm of the church. Paul moves naturally from harmony in the church to harmony in the home. I take this to mean the health of our churches cannot be defined apart from the health of our homes. Harmonious homes functioning according to God's design bring vital stability to the local church. These marriages are a snapshot of church unity, and thus also participate in the cosmic harnessing of all things in Christ yet to come.

(5) Role distinctions and hierarchy in the Christian community are not erased in the new aeon.

However we define mutual submission (5:21), we cannot ignore the next verse (5:22). In fact 5:21 may actually help us to protect headship and subordination among God's people.¹⁶ Paul reveals that

life in the new aeon does not remove hierarchy or role distinctions. Christ was raised in his defeat over cosmic evil, and out of that victory he gives gifts to the church (4:8–12). In this way there are specially-selected men chosen to lead and direct the church, men who are in some way distinguished from “the saints” (4:12). This gift-defined authority does not divide the church but rather builds unity among the people of God, as the context shows. Elsewhere Paul returns to the created order to remind the early churches that gender-based hierarchy is rooted in God's original marriage design (see 1 Cor 11:2–16 and 1 Tim 2:8–15). There is no reason to think the complementary structure of the first marriage in Eden is somehow undone in the new aeon. Quite the opposite. In the new aeon, the celebration of complementary marriage roles is a display of the cosmic harmony brought in the gospel, and a display of the cosmic victory of Christ over the relationship splintering of the old aeon.

(6) New aeon complementary marriage is a micro-cosmic picture of Christ's macro-cosmic work in orienting all things to himself (1:10).

A husband who has repented and has trusted in Christ is a Spirit-filled new creation and belongs to the new aeon. As a result, he is to be committed to selflessly lead and love his wife like Christ leads and loves the church. By his loving leadership he proves himself to be rightly oriented under Christ in the new aeon. His task is not thwarted by the immaturity and sin that he sees in himself. And he is not thwarted by the immaturity and sin he sees in his wife, but he uses those sins to be reminded of the particular and patient care of Christ as he washes and matures his own bride (5:22–28). “A Christian husband loves his wife by offering a lifetime of daily sacrifices, so that she might become ever more radiant as a woman of God.”¹⁷ To this end he presses on. In this self-sacrifice the husband shows that he is rightly aligned vertically under Christ in reverence, and so he seeks to co-operate with his wife in the home for her flourishing (1:9–10; 5:21).

On the other side of the bed, a wife who has repented and trusted in Christ is a Spirit-filled

new creation and she now belongs to the new aeon. As a result, she willingly submits herself to her husband's leadership. Her role is not thwarted by the failings she sees in her husband, but she helps him grow and celebrates his leadership successes. It is no stretch to say that a wife's humble submission to her husband reflects her own proper orientation under Christ (5:22). Thus, it is out of her vertical alignment under Christ in reverence that she seeks to co-operate with her husband in the home (5:21).

It is worth addressing two points that emerge from this connection between marriage roles (5:22–33) and cosmic order in Christ (1:9–10). First, I fear too few men and too few women make this connection between the cosmic work of Christ in orienting all things to himself and to their faithfulness to our Creator-given, Christ-revived, Spirit-empowered roles in marriage.¹⁸ More on that later.

Second, I fear complementarian marriage is too frequently built from a horizontal, rather than a vertical, starting point. We are tempted to root complementarian marriage roles in the responsiveness of our spouses. We suggest that if/when my wife is submissive to me, *then* I will lovingly lead her. Or, if/when my husband starts leading me well, *then* I will submit to him. For the wife this thinking is twisted because even wives of unbelieving husbands are called to submit as a powerful way of winning their husbands (see 1 Pet 3:1–2). For the husband this thinking is profoundly irrational because it clouds the gospel in which Christ died for his bride at the very point that she was an awful, unsubmitive rebel of a wretch (see Rom 5:8)! But even more foundational on both counts, this thinking is wrong because it fails to root the leading of the husband and the submissiveness of the wife in the vertical plane. The posture of the husband to lead and the posture of the wife to submit are postures that find their proper basis in Christians who are properly oriented under Christ (1:9–10) and who live relationally out of reverence to Christ (5:21). Paul makes this point especially clear for the wife in 5:22. The vertical order is the only proper basis for fulfilling our marriage roles in the home, and this vertical orientation will protect the wife when her husband asks her to follow him into sin.

She will at that point not follow because she is first and foremost properly ordered under Christ, and to follow her husband into sin would be to dislocate her vertical orientation of reverence under Christ.

(7) A husband's self-centered laziness and harshness toward his wife is part of the defeated old aeon.

Whatever causes a husband to mishandle his authority is rooted in the old aeon. Men often abuse marriage as either a place for personal ease or as a place for manipulative control. In the old aeon, husbands view marriage as a place *to be served*, not *to serve*. Likewise, in the old aeon men domineer over women through pornography and human trafficking and in a myriad of self-centered ways that twist women into objects of lust. This behavior reflects the old aeon that is twisted by the sinful domineering patterns of cosmic evil. In Christ, that cosmic evil has been defeated. In Ephesians, Paul pens for husbands a counter-cultural new creation lifestyle that uses authority in the home as the basis of the self-giving model of Christ. In the old aeon, men use headship as a way to justify selfishness. In the new aeon, God intends headship as a way to exemplify selflessness. In the new aeon—as was God's intent in the original design of creation—men are called to serve and feed and wash and protect their wives. Christian husbands will feel the perpetual magnetic pull of the old aeon tugging at their marriages, even from their own still-sinful hearts. And that tug must be resisted. Distortions to manhood and husbandhood will remain; temptations will rise up in a man's heart, but those ways of thinking must be seen for what they are: part of the old aeon that is passing away and is to be “put off” by Spirit-filled men of God.

(8) A wife's self-centered independence toward her husband is part of the defeated old aeon.

God created the marriage context for a wife to submit to the leadership of her husband. This was true before sin entered the picture. In Ephesians we behold the work of Christ, the Second Adam, and the Holy Spirit in restoring the wife's proper role. Therefore, whatever causes a wife to *de facto* reject her husband's headship can only be think-

ing rooted in the twisted rebellion of the old aeon. In fact, any thinking that rejects the wife's role to submit to her husband in marriage can only *arise from* the old aeon. Because the Second Adam has defeated evil to restore the proper exercise of marriage roles in the new aeon, because the Holy Spirit empowers a wife's submission, the voice of feminism can speak only from the old aeon—it cannot speak from the new.¹⁹ All of the various forms of distorted thinking that suggest submission has been done away with for Christian wives is to be seen for what it is—thinking that finds its origin in the old and fallen aeon of the world. It is thinking that is passing away. It is thinking that is to be “put off” by Spirit-filled women of God.

(9) Complementarian marriage fits into the Spirit-filled community of the new aeon people of God.

A common assumption is that it does not. Some say that male headship in the home and female submission is overridden in the new aeon, and the common argument is taken from Galatians 3:28. But there is little need (nor room) to discuss Galatians here. We can see in Ephesians that Christ's re-orientation of the cosmos and the inauguration of the new aeon do not erase roles, hierarchy, or headship in the Spirit-filled community of believers. This is obvious in the natural flow of the book and of Christ's distribution of leadership gifts in the church. Within the home there remain distinct roles for the husband and wife, roles defined by the Creator, and roles redeemed by the victory of the Second Adam. Christ does not expunge human hierarchy in the new aeon; he rather purifies and redeems it from the twisted evil of the old aeon.

Now, it is true that marriage will be done away with in heaven (which is the new aeon in full splendor and full manifestation).²⁰ But there is strong evidence to suggest that gender is eternal. And this point combined with the prominence of marriage in the new aeon, should caution us from assuming that eternity will be egalitarian. In fact, the final and eternal submission of Christ to the Father that we read about in 1 Cor 15:27–28 (the final and full fulfillment of Eph 1:10) seems to prove otherwise. That some form of comple-

mentary relationship between men and women will exist in eternity, however changed and transformed and improved and perfected, fits well in a trajectory that flows from Eden to the church and into the new aeon.

So there is no tension between either idea that the new aeon redeems God's original created marriage pattern, and that at some point in history marriage will be finally and fully ended. The principle of continuity behind both marriage harmony and church harmony is the continuity of co-operation of God's people. Likely we will forever fulfill some form of gender-based complementary in our co-operation and harmonious relationships in eternity, and every man and woman will flourish as a result.

(10) A harmonious, complementary, interracial marriage between a believing husband and a believing wife is nearly a perfect microcosm of God's cosmic purpose for the church.

Paul does not explicitly make this connection, but in following his logic it seems to be a beautiful implication of his thinking. The nations are brought together in Christ, and in Christ the church is gathering various ethnicities into one Body. Husbands and wives are a microcosm of the Spirit-filled church unity.²¹ Therefore, local churches should be quick to celebrate a husband and wife with diverse ethnic heritages who are living out a harmonious complementarian marriage under Christ. Such a marriage is an especially beautiful picture of the powerful work of Christ, and of his intention for the church and the cosmos.

(11) Marriage done right is war.

A husband loving his wife like Christ loves the church is a really high calling and really hard work. A wife's submission to her husband is a really high calling and is also really hard work. Complementary marriage is difficult because it strives against the temptations of the old aeon in a warfare played out on a cosmic stage. Satan is out to destroy the harmony of churches and the harmony of marriages. The only way a harmonious complementarian marriage will work is by Spirit-filling (5:18).

And it will require men and women to pick up the weapons of war (6:10–20).

In case we are tempted to think that Paul's cosmic language from the beginning of the letter has been dropped in his application, we are ushered into God's armory to be fitted for battle at the end of the letter. Christ has won the cosmic victory at the beginning of the letter, yet those cosmic powers have not been eradicated, as we see at the end of the letter (6:12). Husbands and wives are to shod themselves with the armor of God in the pushing back of the defeated evil of the old aeon (6:10–20). In this fight to preserve unity in the church and unity in our marriages, we need gifted teachers and leaders (4:7–16). As we are led, as we grow, as we strive against the old aeon in our marriages, we realize that the battle we wage is ultimately to preserve the bold broadcast of the victory of Christ in the gospel (6:18–20). This is spiritual war, and we should not expect anything less in our marriages.

(12) Marriage harmony is largely determined by how we use words.

Such a large section of Ephesians is taken up with an ethic of our tongues (4:1–5:21). Paul especially focuses on this when he addresses Christians in the local church. In the old aeon, corrupting acid came out of our mouths and corroded relationships. Now that we belong to the new aeon in Christ, our language is to give grace and build relationships. It should be no surprise that as soon as Paul is done addressing speech ethics in the church, he addresses wives and husbands. This principle carries over. As relational harmony in the church is largely determined by our language, so too, relational harmony in the home is largely determined by our language. With our tongues we build harmony, we offer love, we lead, we submit. It is in our language that we give evidence that we are properly oriented to Christ (see also Rom 10:9 and 1 John 1:9).

(13) New creation husband-wife complementarian marriage broadcasts to the world the Groom-Bride, New Adam-New Eve, Christ-Church relationship.

So-called “homosexual marriage” cannot do this. Even egalitarian marriages that abandon head-

ship and submission cannot broadcast this mystery to the culture. For the world to see that Christ has given everything for his bride, we need bold and courageous men who love their wives through thoughtful and proactive leadership motivated by radical self-sacrifice. And for the world to see that the church is submitted to Christ the church needs valiant, bold, and courageous women who are submitted to the leadership of their husbands. And a balance must be struck here to proclaim the harmony. It is not enough for men to lead or for women to submit. What is needed is a harmony of loving headship and joyful submission, a complementarian relationship that requires the Spirit-filled power of God (5:18). In this way, the *mystery* of the cosmic plan of God in Christ is broadcast to the world. Our marriages can achieve no higher end on earth, and it is to this end we must strive.²²

Drawing it All Together

The book of Ephesians draws together four Christological pillars that I outlined in the first section of this article. I believe Paul intentionally pulls complementarian marriage harmony into the discussion to show how it serves as a unique point of unity in God's redemptive plan and in the display of the mystery of Christ to the world (5:32). Returning to the four themes we saw at the beginning, here is a summary of the marriage connections in Ephesians:

- (1) A husband and wife who live out a harmonious complementarian marriage show themselves to be rightly oriented under Christ now, which is God's plan for the cosmos ultimately.
- (2) A husband and wife who live out a harmonious complementarian marriage are a microcosm of the Spirit-filled life and unity of the new aeon people of God.
- (3) A husband and wife who live out a harmonious complementarian marriage are a living illustration of the restorative power of the Second Adam in redeeming God's original creation design.
- (4) A husband and wife who live out a harmonious complementarian marriage are a living microcosm of the gos-

pel's power to unify the sin-splintered humanity.

Putting the letter of Ephesians together into a unified vision for Christian marriage I would say it this way: By his death and resurrection, Christ broke the power of sin and death of the old aeon, he inaugurated the new aeon,²³ and he has become the centerpiece of the universe. He has now begun to bring his rebellious creation into alignment to himself in the church. This is the *mystery* of God finally revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In Christ, the church is now being populated by new creation people of God, sinners who are now humbly submitted to Christ and who pursue unity with one another within a structure of authority under Christ and out of reverence to him (5:21). The unity of the Spirit-filled church is expressed in Spirit-filled couples. A husband submits to Christ in his selfless sacrifice and loving leadership of his wife, in the same way Christ uses his self-sacrificing authority to sanctify the church (5:25–33). A wife submits to Christ as she submits herself to the God-given authority of her husband, just as the church submits to Christ (5:22–24).

A redeemed marriage broadcasts the power of the gospel. A harmonious complementarian marriage is a beautiful picture of the new humanity Christ has achieved in his cosmic victory. This marriage is a snapshot of the church, and a microcosm of the cosmic work of Christ. Complementarian marriage displays the new aeon victory of Christ over the old aeon. Thus, part of Christ's work in eschatologically harnessing all of his rebellious creation into submission is *right now* being fulfilled in the divinely appointed complementarian structures in marriage—as Spirit-filled men and women, once fragmented by sin, are now living in marriage harmony. These harmonious complementarian marriages re-announce to the rulers and authorities of the old aeon the victory of Christ (3:10; 6:12).

The big point to see is this: The *mystery* revealed in Christ's orienting of the cosmos to himself (1:9–10) and the *mystery* of Christ's union with the church illustrated in marriage (5:22–33) are intimately and strategically interconnected.

One day Christ's work of bringing all things into cosmic submission to himself will be finally completed—death will be no more, every knee will bow to Christ, and all things will be finally ordered under him. The church has already been oriented under Christ. Complementarian, Spirit-filled marriages are evidence of husbands and wives who are already properly oriented under Christ. What yet awaits is the return of Christ to finally and fully orient all of heaven and earth in the same way. At that climactic point in cosmic history, when all has been finally submitted under the feet of Christ (the Second Adam), he will then submit himself and the fully harnessed cosmos over to the Father (see 1 Cor 15:27–28). It is this ultimate cosmic goal that brings meaning and clarity to God's design for Christian marriage.

Indeed it is perfectly appropriate for one theologian to write, "To the extent that a married couple sees itself as part of the global eschatological movement toward 'summing up all things in Christ' (1:10), it will experience fulfillment and share the perspective on marriage Paul presents in the passage at hand [5:22–32]." ²⁴ Lord, may this vision for marriage in the cosmic storyline take hold of our marriages.

ENDNOTES

¹For the sake of length, this article will not address the important roles of single men and women in the church, nor will it address marriages in which only one spouse is a follower of Christ. This narrows my audience, but it also keeps the focus here on marriages in which a Christian husband is married to a Christian wife in order to drive home Paul's logic in Eph 5:22–33.

²Puritan Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Edinburgh, 1861), 1:196: "Take all things in heaven and in earth, all creatures else, and they shall all be restored to him; and when that is done, there is all God's full plot, all that was in his heart toward Christ, and us, and the whole creation. There is a time a-coming wherein the creatures shall be restored, all things in heaven and in earth, to their first original, and a more glorious condition, in and through Christ."

³Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 3:454–55.

⁴Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 573.

⁵Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 44ff.

⁶See G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 298–304, 835–70.

⁷See *ibid.*, 346–49.

⁸Frank Thielman, "Ephesians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 814.

⁹Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 180–81.

¹⁰See *ibid.*, 882–83. One may object by asking why the parent/child and master/slave structures in 6:1–9 do not also participate in the mystery, and that is simply because marriage is a human institution created by God to reveal this mystery in a way other institutions (God ordained or merely cultural) do not. The child's subordinate relationship with his parents is not part of the *mystery*, nor is the slave's subordinate relationship to his master (a relationship not instituted by God to begin with). The gospel certainly provides moral guidance for these other relationships, but marriage remains unique. Thus we must be careful not to write off headship and submission as merely cultural defined preferences that are no more relevant today than is Greco-Roman slavery. The marriage relationship in 5:22–33 appears in God's redemptive-historical unveiling of the mystery in Christ. For more on this distinction of marriage within early Roman household code, see Everett Berry, "Complementarianism and Eschatology: Engaging Gordon Fee's 'New Creation' Egalitarianism," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 64–65.

¹¹See D. A. Carson's lecture, "Creation and Re-creation—Male and Female in the Image of God, The Fall and Redemption" [accessed 18 Aug 2012]. Online: <http://stream.efca.org/efcatc2012/Session%206%20DA%20Carson.mp3>.

¹²Goodwin, *Works* 1:518: "God doth take the same world that was Adam's, and makes it new and glorious; the same creation groaneth for this new world, this new clothing; as we groan to be clothed upon, so doth this whole creation. And as God takes the same substance of man's nature, and engrafteth the new creature upon it, the same man still; so he takes the same world, and maketh a new world, a world to come, for the second Adam. For the substance of the same world shall be restored to a glory which Adam could never have raised it unto, the same world that was lost in Adam. And this God will do before he hath done with it; and this restitution is the world to come."

¹³An especially strong case is made for headship and submission exiting in the sinless, pre-fall world by Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr. in his chapter "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway 1991), 86–104.

¹⁴John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2011), 220.

¹⁵Timothy G. Gombis, "A Radically New Humanity: The Function Of The Haustafel In Ephesians," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 2 (2005): 319.

¹⁶Clearly 5:21 does not signal the end of male headship in marriage. This is rather a focus on co-operation among believers that is typified in marriage. See Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., *God's Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 152–53. Likewise, Gombis writes, "The *Haustafel* as aimed at counteracting the devastating effects of the powers upon human relationships and in transforming relationships within appropriate hierarchical structures. The solution that Paul provides does not involve overthrowing such structures, but rather subjecting them to new creation dynamics so that relationships within the New Humanity take on a renewed character. In this context, then, Paul is not calling for mutual submission, but for the ordering of the New Humanity in such a way that involves subordination" ("A Radically New Humanity," 324).

¹⁷Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife*, 158.

¹⁸Although some do. For a rare exception see the article by Rebecca Jones, "Submission: A Lot More Than Giving In," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 3, no. 4 (Winter 1998).

¹⁹See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation* 3.2 (T&T Clark, 1960), 312.

²⁰That marriage will not take place in heaven is clear enough from Jesus' words in Scripture (Matt 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:35). But evidence suggests there will remain a preserved gender-identity in the bodily resurrection, therefore leaving open the possibility that gender-based complementary structures will exist in eternity. See Daniel R. Heimbach, "The Unchangeable Difference: Eternally Fixed Sexual Identity For an Age of Plastic Sexuality," in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (ed. Wayne A. Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 274–89. See also Mark David Walton, "What We Shall Be: A Look at Gender and the New Creation," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 9, no. 1 (2004): 15–26; and Mark David Walton, "Relationships and Roles in the New Creation," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 11, no. 1 (2006): 3–17.

²¹On the beauty of interracial marriage in the Church see chapter 15, "Interracial Marriage," in John Piper, *Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

²²Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 883–84: "It is true that marriage is for the purposes of fulfillment in love (physically, spiritually, and emotionally), for propagation, and for sanctification. When problems arise in the marriage relationship, husbands and wives need to remember that there is an ultimate redemptive-historical purpose for marriage that transcends their own human relationship. As husbands unconditionally love their wives and as wives respond to this love in a faithful manner, they are actors on a redemptive-historical stage performing a play before the onlooking audience of the world. As husbands and wives perform their roles on this stage in the way God has designed, their roles are an object lesson to the watching world that Christ has left his Father to love become one with his bride, and that those who respond in faith can become part of this corporate bride. In doing so, people will leave the sphere of the old world and enter into the new. Christian mates are part of the new creation, and the ethic regulating their marriage is a recapitulation of the original design of marriage in Eden, which pointed to Christ and the church. When conflict enters the marriage relationship and division begins to occur, both partners need to remember that they have covenanted with each other before God to love each other, to remain loyal to that covenant, to continue to become one and, hence, to maintain the peace of the new creation of which they are a part. In contrast to the divisions and conflicts that remain elsewhere in the old creation, husbands and wives are to reflect the peaceful unity that was to have been characteristic of Adam and Even in Eden before sin (and that would have been characteristic of all marriages in imitation of Adam and Eve's marriage if sin had not occurred). This peaceful unity that was to be true of the first marriage in history is to be characteristic of all those living in the inaugurated phase of the new creation in Christ."

²³For more on this important theme see <http://spurgeon.wordpress.com/2010/03/24/the-cosmic-shock-wave-christs-resurrection-and-the-dawn-of-the-new-creation>.

²⁴Andreas J. Köstenberger, "The Mystery Of Christ And The Church: Head And Body, 'One Flesh,'" *Trinity Journal* 12, no. 1 (1991): 93.