



“Great Expectations”

Ephesians 5:21-33

It began well. The stuff of fairy tales always does. A worldly wise, 30-something bachelor chose a shy young schoolteacher to be his bride. If he seemed less than love struck, the world was quickly smitten. Their storybook wedding was performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, attended by world leaders and heads of state, and watched by millions of ordinary people. After a long and luxurious honeymoon cruise and a few idyllic days in Scotland secluded from worldly intrusion, real married life began.

Twelve years later, the marriage ended, not in divorce, but rather in a formal division. They would remain husband and wife, but in name only. She would be allowed certain freedoms in exchange for “keeping up appearances.” He would maintain a separate residence and a separate identity. Royalty has its privileges, no doubt, but the marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales, which began with such pomp and promise, began looking remarkably like hundreds and thousands of other, less privileged domestic unions.

Explanations abound, of course, after the fact. She was too young; he was too preoccupied. Other parties were involved; old romantic alliances were not dissolved; family intrusions were insurmountable, the scrutiny of the press was crippling. Their differences, exciting at first, became irritating in time. Their roles became reversed as he ironically noted, “I seem to do nothing but collect flowers these days.” She became more independent than either of them imagined she might: “When we first married, I needed Charles by my side. Now I can cope on my own. Then finally, I’ll go out and do my bit in the way I know how, and I’ll leave him behind.” Statements issued by Buckingham Palace

confirmed what Charles and Diana had already telegraphed by innuendo to friends, acquaintances, reporters, and subjects: the legal union might well survive, but the marriage had died.

Statistically speaking, half the marriages in America do not survive “till death do us part.” Realistically speaking, many of those that do, simply exist in name only. We seem to be living in a land of ho-hum husbands and worn-out wives, all going through the motions of marriage, but missing the magic of committed love. The very thought of romance in the home seems foreign—and the idea that marriage can end “happily ever after” is obviously reserved for the very newly-wed. But I believe that the home is the perfect setting for romance, and that no matter how long you’ve been married—or to whom you’re married!—you can have a marriage that ends “happily ever after.”

Marriage has a bad reputation today. It is entered into lightly or avoided at all costs; it is routinely demeaned by celebrities, social commentators, and the mass media. But marriage itself is not the problem.

Standing at the altar we all had a picture of what our marriage would look like. The problem is this picture of marriage ends up as expectations that we unload on our spouse. In any marriage it is critical that these expectations be recognized for the potential they have to alter the way we relate with one another. So what are we to do with our expectations? That is what we are going to discover in this “Happily Ever After” marriage series.

Observation

What do you see?

Ephesians 5:21-33

²¹Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²²Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰for we are members of his body. ³¹"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³²This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Record your first impressions from what you read.

Interpretation

What does it mean?

Points of Interpretation

These verses summarize the immediate personal consequences of obeying the command to be filled with the Spirit, namely humbly submitting to others. The rest of the epistle features instruction based on obedience to this command.

5:21...*Submit to one another* Paul here made a transition and introduced his teaching about specific relationships of authority and submission among Christians by declaring unequivocally that every spirit-filled Christ follower is to be a humble, submissive Christian. This is foundational to all the relationships in this section. No believer is inherently superior to any other believer. In their standing before God, they are equal in every way (Galatians 3:28).

5:21...*reverence for Christ* The believer's continual reverence for God is the basis for his submission to other believers.

Points of Interpretation continued ...

5:22...Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord Having established the foundational principle of submission (v.21), Paul applied it first to the wife. The command is unqualified, applying to every Christian wife, no matter what her own abilities, education, knowledge of Scripture, spiritual maturity, or any other qualifications might be in relation to those of her husband. The submission is not the husband's to command but for the wife to willingly and lovingly offer. "*Your husband*" limits her submission to the one man God has placed over her, and also gives a balancing emphasis that he is hers as a personal intimate possession. She submits to the man she possesses as her own.

5:25...Husbands, love your wives Though the husband's authority has been established (vv.22-24), the emphasis moves to the supreme responsibility of husbands in regard to their wives, which is to love them with the same unreserved, selfless, and sacrificial love that Christ has for His church. Christ gave everything He had, including His own life, for the sake of His church, and that is the standard of sacrifice for a husband's love of his wife (Colossians 3:19).

Application

What do I do?

Questions of Application

1. How have the following affected your expectations going into marriage? What pictures of marriage have you tried to imitate or avoid?
 - a. TV
 - b. Books or Magazines
 - c. Your Parent's Marriage(s)
 - d. Other Marriages

2. Have you ever felt like you just couldn't measure up—that you just couldn't meet the expectations you felt were placed upon you? Maybe this occurred with your parents, your spouse, your boss, a coach or someone else. How did this affect the relationship?

3. What about leaving? Why is this option sometimes tempting? What is the problem with this option?

4. Have you ever tried to make your spouse more like you? Does it work? What message does this give your spouse?

5. When expectations collide, one of the most popular options is to compromise. However, compromise can backfire when you are more committed to your marriage than your partner. Have you observed this?

Correlation

How do we work this into our life?

Core Competency: Love

Creed: I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Key Verse: 1 John 4:10-12 “This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.”

Use the Assessment Statements to help you evaluate how you are doing at applying this creed in your daily life.

- * God enables me to forgive people who have hurt me. (Q#21 of the CLP)
- * I rejoice when good things happen to other people. (Q#51 of the CLP)
- * I demonstrate love equally toward people of all races. (Q#81 of the CLP)
- * I frequently give up what I want for the sake of others. (Q#111 of the CLP)

A Difficult Situation:

What we anticipate seldom occurs, what we least expect generally happens—especially in marriage. Saying “I do” brings with it a host of conscious and unconscious expectations that aren’t always fulfilled.

Bill and Candace, a couple in their late twenties and married for four years, each had a clear image of what life together would be like, but they had never discussed their ideas. They, like most newly weds, simply assumed the other had an identical picture of marriage in mind. Nothing, however, could have been further from the truth.

Candace: “I expected married life to bring more stability and predictability to our lifestyle. To me it meant working in the garden together.”

Bill: “I wanted our marriage to be exciting and spontaneous, not a ho-hum routine. To me it meant riding a motorcycle together.”

As far back as early childhood, Bill and Candace began dreaming of how married life would be. They grew up in homes where parents modeled “married life.” They read books describing loving relationships. They watched television shows and movies depicting scenes from marriage. For years they had fantasized about life after crossing the threshold. With little effort, each had formed an idea of what it would and should be like to live as a married couple.

Consciously and unconsciously, Bill and Candace painted brushstrokes on their mental marital canvases. But it never occurred to either of them that the other might be working from a different palette. They simply *assumed* their lifelong partner would work with complementary colors and in a similar style.

The first year of marriage, however, revealed sharp and unexpected contrasts. What Candace thought of as security, Bill thought of as boring. They valued many of the same things, but with different levels of intensity. Candace painted carefully with delicate pastels; Bill painted boldly with primary colors.

What advice would you have for Bill and Candace?

