



Imago Dei
Part 5 – Two Become One
Ted Cunningham

Welcome to Woodland Hills Family Church. We're glad you're here. To everyone over at the Chapel, welcome. All of our church at home family, welcome; we're glad you are tuning in today to be a part of worship with us. As part of our worship, we take an offering at Woodland Hills Family Church. There are several ways that you can give. You can leave it in the boxes in the back, you can go on the Church Center app and set it up there, you can hit the "Give online now" button, or you can text any amount to 84321. We just say thank you for your generosity. The generosity of this church allows us to do so much in meeting the needs of our church family, in this community, and then with missions around the world. We're grateful for all that you do.

Last Sunday night, I was finishing up the Chiefs' game. I am married to a woman who I have never heard make one sound about any sporting activity, whether in person or on television. As we got to the end of the Chiefs' game, I said, "You really need to watch what's going on here. I can't explain it. I don't know all the rules, but there is a lot happening right now." There was one team basically packing up, ready to go as the winners... How many of you turned off the television and went to bed, thinking the Chief lost? Isn't that something? And then you woke up the next morning to Putin and the Chiefs. Those were the two stories leading out in the news. My wife cheered at the end of the Chiefs game like I've never heard a woman cheer. I'm like, "Are we Chiefs' fans now? Are we into this?" Do we have any Bengals fans in the room right now? There were two in the first service, and they felt judged, if I'm being really honest.

I was at my son's basketball game in Hurly this week. I was so inspired. I sat behind one of Stone County's finest, a Deputy Sherriff. He stood there the whole time. He looked like a guy you didn't want to mess with. And the game got a little rowdy. Parents, members of Woodland Hills Family Church, got a little rowdy, got a little lippy. I'm not calling anybody out. One's initials would be Jeff Reynolds, but I'm not calling out anybody other than that. Nobody else gets called out. If I knew the rules, I would probably yell more too, but I've never seen this happen in professional sports. Maybe it happens and it's just never on camera.

At halftime and at the end of the game, these two refs sprinted out of the gym to get to safety and the Sheriff's Deputy followed right behind them. I was like, I'm going to start doing that at church when we have message like we have today. This is one of those I will be sprinting out the back and Gary Hazel has committed to coming with me.

Today, we are concluding our series, Imago Dei. If you didn't catch last week's message by Dr. Brawner on Sanctity of Life Sunday... I think it's one of those messages you need to go back to a couple of times

to absorb everything that he shared. We do a debrief after the 8:30 every week. I was sitting on the front row, just kind of smiling, like what do I have to offer this message? I just went back and I said, "I think you mispronounced some words; I'm not 100% sure, Dr. Brawner, but we need to work through some of that." But I want to encourage you to go back as we've looked at the imago Dei, the image of God in man.

We've looked at how we are personally autographed by God. Adam Donyes spoke about every nation, tribe, and tongue. Then we looked at male and female, he created them. Last week, we looked at the image of God in the unborn. Today, we are ending with Marriage, the two becoming one.

I want to give you a definition of what we believe about marriage in a simple and as concise of a statement as we can say. **We believe a loving, sacrificing, (We are going to see this in Ephesians 5: 21 with submitting to one another and what that means) lifetime (until either the Lord returns or call one of us home) marriage between a husband and wife honors the image of God in men, women, and marriage.**

When we say this, we want you to know, as we go today into Genesis 2 and into Ephesians 5, at this church, scripture drives the bus, meaning with a lot of churches and a lot of authors you'll hear it's almost as though they are explaining away the scripture. We have no desire to explain away the scripture, we want to explain the scripture as clearly as we can, keeping it in the driver's seat, not only of this conversation, but of our lives, our marriages, our families. That being said, we know that there are many traditions around what we're talking about today. Tradition is on the bus; it's just not driving the bus.

We also know there are experiences that are part of this conversation. Many of you may explain away the scripture because of a horrific marriage that you have been through, married to a lousy spouse, married to someone who didn't take care of you, married to someone who wasn't walking in the Spirit or walking in reverence to Christ. We understand that experience. So, we know there is also a lot of emotion behind this today. We want to clearly, as clearly as we can, state the imago Dei, the image of God in marriage. What it means, what we believe, but you're also going to get a lot of what we do not believe. We want to be as clear as possible.

My favorite thing to start with, because we've been in Genesis 1 throughout this whole series, is this idea of two becoming one. When we talk about one flesh... I love this very first thought that comes to us out of Genesis 1 and 2, and it's two becoming one mission. I love this because I love the idea of walking side by side through the toilsome labor under the sun with my wife. God did not give me my spouse to be the grind of life; he gave me my spouse to walk side by side through the grind of life.

I love watching this play out. Some of you, husbands and wives, you work together in business. You know the challenges that can come with that. But you also know the beauty of that when two people are walking and working side by side through the grind of life.

Tonight, I get to do a Date Night event in Little Rock. My passion is Ecclesiastes 9: 9 at those events. Enjoy life with your wife whom you love all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you

under the sun all your meaningless days, for this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. Life is challenging under the sun, but we have our spouse to go through that with us. Singles, don't checkout on this because marriage brings a flourishing life whether you're married or single. We know that the imago Dei, the image of God in marriage is important for all of culture, lifting up an entire culture, an entire society whether you're single or married. This idea of being on mission.

We read in Genesis 1: 27-28, where we've been through this whole series, this foundational doctrine of the image of God in man. **27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female...** Fully image bearers of Almighty God with equal, automatic, intrinsic value and worth. **...he created them.**

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

What we're going to see as we move to Genesis 2, is that God places Adam in the Garden and he gives them the job to work it. Work is not part of the curse; it's part of God's created plan for us. So, he puts Adam in the Garden to work it. I love this line as we lead into this one mission, one vision that you can have for a couple working together.

Timothy Keller, in *The Meaning of Marriage*, he puts it this way, "*A common vision (or I would even say mission) can united people of very different temperaments.*" If you are married to someone with a very different temperament, not temper, temperament, than you, would raise your hand? And God brought you together for that complementary relationship. I think one of my favorite things to watch... I've shared this story with you before, but when I think about a beautiful, complementary relationship of a couple that lives out God's created design for marriage, his plan for marriage... It's not a cultural construct, it's not something that man came up with. Jesus was very clear, in the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, for this reason, you shall leave your father and mother and be united to your wife and become one flesh. This is God's idea. This is God's plan. He invites us into it.

One couple on television that I see playing this out the best is Chip and Joanna Gaines, with *Fixer Upper*. It is beautiful to watch. Now, I still stand by the fact that I hate Chip Gaines with every ounce of my being. And if I ever meet the guy, I'm going to punch him right in the face. I've already made that decision. I hate everything he stands for. I hate his joyous attitude as he works around these houses. I shared that a few weeks ago at a church in Colleyville, Texas, and I didn't know that was the church his parents attend. I never really thought about his mom hearing that joke. But we'll see.

Because with Amy, I come home from work and she goes, "I think after dinner, we're going to get rid of this wall right here." That's Chip Gaines. Then I give her that term. It's one of my favorite terms, I use it all the time – load bearing, right? Every wall in our home is load bearing. Let's keep this in this room and on the internet alone. Don't let Amy know this. Our house is built with trusses. There will be a few guys that laugh because you know what that means. I could move every wall underneath the truss and it's fine, but she doesn't know that. We're not touching the walls.

When you watch Fixer Upper, with Chip and Joanna Gaines, who's in charge of the project? Yes. Joanna is in charge of the project. Chips working away, doing his thing he loves to do, so happy. She comes in and she gets strong. She wanting to move things and change things. And Chip Gaines does it. We know she's calling all the shots. But I don't for a moment... I know they are a committed couple not just to each other, but first and foremost to the Lord. They love the Lord. And let me tell you something. And I think our theology is right on because I think we agree with the way and the values that they hold. I could look at them and I don't doubt for a second that Chip Gaines is the spiritual leader of that home. I watch it and I just watch this beautiful common vision, mission play out and I'm like *this is beautiful*.

Today, before we get to wives submit to your husbands, all elbows inside your seats at all times. Before this ride begins, I want all elbows... and keep your hands and feet inside the seat at all times. And husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church. I want us to get this beautiful picture of what God designed. I want to be a part of what God created, what God designed, and how he invites us into that.

We read in Genesis 2... Adam has been in the garden and he's working. **19 Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky.** If you're checking into this series for the very first time, it's all created by God, but only humans are created in the image of God, giving us automatic, intrinsic value, the pinnacle of creation. But he created the birds and formed all the wild animals. **He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.** I love this text. We're seeing what you see as you walk through museums throughout our country. I just picture this role that Adam was given.

20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. This word *helper* is a word that I know progressive don't like today, but today, as we talk about headship and helper, we want to see it as God's design, God's plan. There was no suitable helper found among all that he was already spending time with. **21 So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs... My friend, John Branyan, said, "Clearly that was the rib God gave man to read a woman's mind." ...and then closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.**

Let me tell you, I get an opportunity to see this at every wedding I perform, and it is beautiful. I get to stand by the groom as the bride walks down the aisle. Let's picture that for just a second. What was Adam's first thought as God brought Eve to him? Wow! I've heard that at weddings. I've heard nothing at weddings sometimes because of all the crying, emotions, tears. Anybody getting married any time soon, there's no rush. Stop rushing the weddings. Slow down the pace walking down the aisle. There's no rush. Let's have the wow. What a beautiful picture.

23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

To paraphrase Luther, and I love this picture that we get as we move into one flesh. "God might have taken a bone from a toe to signify that Adam was to rule over her; or he might have taken a bone from

his head to indicate her rule over him. But by taking a bone from his side, God implied equality and mutual respect.”

This is the picture – side by side through the garden. Working together on mission, common vision.

This is why I love Ecclesiastes 9: 9. God didn’t give you your spouse to beat you down and suck the life out of you so you can be more like Jesus. He gave you your spouse to go side by side with you through the toilsome labor under the sun.

Do you think Adam and Eve had toilsome labor? Yeah, they did. You and I have toilsome labor and God has given this beautiful design of marriage that we get to walk through with someone else. Let that be your first understanding of two becoming one.

We move on to Verse 24 and we understand this. Two become one; it only happens after you leave home. You gotta go. You can’t be with Mom and Dad forever. You leave home. We would teach this to our kids. My son is in this service. I’d tell him when he was very young, “We love you, you’re a welcome addition to this home, you’re not the center of it. Your mom and I have big plans after you leave.” He’d be like, “Well, what are you gonna do?” “Well, first of all, we’re going to Disney World and that’s how we’re kicking the whole thing off.” We’re less than a year and a half away from empty nesting. So, I love Genesis 2: 24 even more. After the woman is presented to the man...

24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother... It doesn’t say a child or an adolescent, meaning it is the job of a parent to make sure children leave home as adults, not on a journey to become one. It’s not the college’s job, it’s not a dean’s job, it’s not a professor’s job, it’s not a first employer’s job; it’s a mom and dad’s job for children to leave. How do you leave? You leave home physically. You gotta go. You can’t be here forever. We have a basement, but it ain’t yours.

You not only leave home physically, but you also leave home relationally and emotionally, meaning your spouse is going to become your priority relationship, not your parent. Love your mom, that’s great, but don’t make a phone call to her five times a day. When you get good news at work, mom is not your first phone call, your spouse is your first phone call. When you have a bad day at work, your spouse is your first phone call, not your mom. You leave home financially. You leave home, if necessary, geographically.

Then it says, **...and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.** And that means exactly what you think it means. The marriage bed is where one flesh, physical intimacy is seen. This beautiful, naked, vulnerable, all of my walls are down, I am secure in the arms of my spouse. There is safety here and we become one flesh. And let me tell you that most problems with the marriage bed are not in the bedroom, they are in the marriage and in the relationship. You cannot be a harsh, intimidating, controlling, manipulative spouse and a gentle, tender, kind, giving lover. It doesn’t work that way. You can’t mistreat your spouse all day, guys, and then think at 9:00 or 10:00, a switch is flipped. That’s not one-flesh marriage. A man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and the two become one flesh.

Just to share because I've been... Any time I hear from members of our church, young or old, that they've started dating online, I get involved. I feel there is a need to get involved because we've had a lot of people experience fraud. That's the first reason I get involved. It's not a real person you're dating. You are being taken advantage of. Don't ever send money to someone you've never met face to face. That's a parenthetical thought there. But then I've watched some people form their profiles and I found some of these profile names. These are the names people use like first impression, and I want to help because these are bad. I wouldn't use these if you're trying to meet someone online.

The first one was MyMomLovesMe. Again, it goes against everything we just talked about. I think it's great your mom loves you, just don't lead out with that. Show respect and honor to your parents on a first date, just don't talk about your mom the whole date. That's a red flag.

How about this next one? These are real names. I didn't make this up. AdorableSleeper24. No, don't sleep; get a job.

How about this one? MySeptumIsPierced35. Some of you are going *I can't believe he said septum in church*. It's part of your nose. I can get Dr. Brawner back up here to explain things to you if you need another biology lesson.

I love this one. UnemployedButLooking29.

I know there are senior ladies in this church that are desiring to date, and I think I might have found the one for you. I don't know. I thought it was adorable. PapaSmurf72. I don't know, but definitely meet him before you go...

Two become one until death do they part. It is until either the Lord returns or calls one of you home. Jesus says this in Matthew 19: 6. After Jesus quotes Genesis 1 and 2, **6 "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."**

Here's where we want to spend the rest of our time together today. Two become one to reflect the image of God and model the gospel of Jesus. Remember what we have said since the beginning of this series. As image bearers, we reflect, resemble the image of God, the glory of God to the world. At the same time, we rule with his authority over all of creation. And now, as we get this creation order, Paul is going to draw... In Ephesians 5, he's going to draw from the created order design of God for marriage. Headship, helper, all of that is going to be drawn in as he explains the gospel of Jesus.

Timothy Keller, in *The Meaning of Marriage*, puts it this way. As we talked about submission, I know this is the one that people always come to me with and go, "Well what about this verse? Ephesians 5: 21, as we talk about wives submit to your husbands. Husbands lead your homes well... "Ted, what do you do with Ephesians 5: 21? I love Ephesians 5: 21. Ephesians 5: 21 is a very important text; it's God's word. I don't start there, and I don't stop there. A lot of people in this conversation in marriage love Ephesians 5: 21, have very different opinions from me and theology from me when it comes to marriage because they start and stop with Ephesians 5: 21 and they are like, "This verse says it all and you don't need all the rest of what God gives us."

Here's what Timothy Keller says about it. *"Spiritual friendship (as we talk about submission) is eagerly helping one another know, serve, love, and resemble God in deeper and deeper ways. This is the desire."*

Ephesians 5: 21 **21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.** And most people, when debating the roles of husband and wife in marriage, stare too long at the word *submit*. I want to encourage us as we go through this text, don't stare at the word *submit*, gaze upon Christ. This is the key. If you go back to verse 18... I said we don't start or stop here. If you go back to Verse 18, Verse, 18 says don't be drunk with wine but be filled with the spirit, so this text on marriage is going to say, "Hey, Listen, this is about being filled with the Spirit and walking in reverence to Christ. So, when you do this, this is what marriage looks like.

But so many people are married to someone who is not walking in the Spirit and not walking in reverence to Christ, and they are like, Okay, so that means... No, creation doesn't change because of how your spouse treated you. This is God's plan. This is what we are called to, and we are invited into, and we get to see the beauty and design of God with the image of God in marriage and say this is what we want. And you have a decision to make today, just like I have a decision to make today. Am I going to drift with the world and follow a liberal drift and go the direction of "Well, that doesn't really fit with what culture wants anymore," or will I stay true to following the Word of God?

At this church, we believe... You're going to get a lot of "we believe" statements and a lot of what we don't believe, but we believe, according to Ephesians 6: 21, in mutual submission.

John Piper says, *"Mutual submission is really easy to understand, but not always easy to live."*

To me, it's about getting underneath Amy and doing everything I can every day to lift her up. That's what it means.

Andy Stanley uses the analogy of a race to the back of the line. And as the husband, as the leader of our home, I want to win the race to the back of the line every single time. I think that's exactly what you read in Ephesians 5.

Think about this. Remember when Jesus knelt on the ground and submitted himself to the role of servant to wash the feet of the disciples? Do you think anybody in that moment questioned who the leader was? He was the leader. He submitted himself to the disciples.

Let's look at a definition of this before we get into the rest of Ephesians 5. This is Grudem and Piper. Do Christ and the church mutually submit to each other? That's going to be the picture we have in the rest of Ephesians 5. Christ and the church, and how it's modeled in marriage. "Do Christ and the church mutually submit to each other? They do not if submission means Christ yields to the authority of the church. But they do if submission means that Christ submitted himself to suffering and death for the good of the church. That, however, is not how the church submits to Christ. The church submits to Christ by affirming his authority and following his lead."

Let's go where angels dare to tread. Ephesians 5: **22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.** Don't lose the "to the Lord." Don't take your eyes off of Christ in this text. If you do, you miss the whole point of this text.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife... I get questioned on this all the time. And other authors or speakers or pastors who won't teach this. They're like, "Well, okay, it doesn't really mean the husband is the head of the wife." "Ted, what do you think it means?" I go, "Well, okay, I think it means the husband is the head of the wife. I don't know; I'm going to read it." I've had brides tell me, "I don't even what it read." "You don't want me to explain that I can't read it?" Do you know the ground you're on when you don't even want scripture read? You're in drift. The husband is the head of the wife. This is creation coming out.

...as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. We're going to talk about this "in everything" in just a second because this "in everything..." This church does not, under any circumstances, tell a wife to submit to an abusive husband. Not at all. But there are some who do, but not at this church. You need to know that. We stand with victims. We stand with getting victims to safety.

We believe the wife is called to submit to her husband as unto the Lord. This is the image of God in marriage, the imago Dei. This is very important though. Straight from Ephesians 5 because some people extrapolate some from this that it doesn't say. We do not believe that women are called to submit to all men. You don't read that in Ephesians 5. We're talking husbands and wives, not men and women.

I talked this week with some folks about an organization that's questioning whether or not a woman can be in leadership. I'm just like it's not a marriage and it's not a church. And I don't want my wife to be told that she needs to submit to every man she comes face to face with. You don't get that in this text. Yes, you can have a woman leader at your work and submit to her authority. We're not talking men and women, we're talking husbands and wives.

Submission does not mean replacing Christ with your husband. You have a relationship with the Lord. It doesn't mean you lose your individual walk with Christ. You still have your walk with Jesus.

Submission, as we summed up in Genesis, is not an issue of superior vs inferior or greater vs lesser. Both husband and wife have automatic, intrinsic, equal value as image bearers before Almighty God.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish... Who wouldn't want to marry this guy? For those who say, "I don't need a man," you don't want this man? You don't want a man who is following after Jesus, filled with the Spirit, walking in reverence to Christ, submitting himself to the Lord, dying to himself daily, getting up every day and figuring out how he can serve his spouse. "How can I serve my wife? What can I do to care for her? What can I do to help her grow in the Lord?" What?!

The reason there is so much pushback on Ephesians 5 is because of lousy men. Don't allow a lousy husband to keep you from looking to the good examples that are all over this church of men who get up every day and die to themselves for their wives. Find that couple. Model your marriage after that couple. Every marriage is a duet in need of great backup singers. You need great backup singers surrounding you and your duet.

A man who does this without blemish, *...but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— 30 for 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.”*

Timothy Keller says, “In Ephesians 5, Paul shows us that even on earth, Jesus did not use his power to oppress us, but sacrificed everything to bring us into union with him. If God had the gospel of Jesus’ salvation in mind when he established marriage, then marriage only works to the degree that approximates the pattern of God’s self-giving love in Christ.”

This is your church, and you need to know this is what we believe and what we do not believe.

We stand against all forms of abuse. All forms of abuse. We believe the husband is called to lovingly lead his wife. Guys, make it a race to the back of the line. Get up every day and die to yourself.

We speak out against any husband who would use this text to dominate his wife. That is not a godly man. For you to use this text to rule over your wife with an iron fist, that is not at all what Ephesians 5 is talking about, and you’ve missed the entire point of the text. Be a man filled with the Spirit, walking in reverence to Christ.

We believe decisions in marriage are best made with the win/win. I know hardline complementarians believe that a husband brings his opinion to the decision-making process and the wife brings her opinion to the decision and if it’s a tie, the husband wins and the husband gets the final say. I know strong complementarians that still believe that. I have found that I just keep getting down, “Okay, what? Okay, what? We’re not done with the race. Obviously, I still need to run to the back of the line.” Do you see how this all breaks down if you remove the “be filled with the Spirit,” “walk in reverence to Christ,” submit to one another in that. I want my wife’s needs and comfort to come before mine.

For some of you, this is the first time you’ve ever heard this. “Ted, we can debate a lot of what you shared today.” I agree; we can. I think that’s why Paul concludes this text with this.

32 This is a profound mystery... Yeah, we’re talking about challenging stuff, but we’re talking about how God designed it. We’re talking about the image of God in the marriage, this beautiful creation. It’s a profound mystery, *...but I am talking about Christ and the church.* And how a marriage is to model this. **33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.**

For those right now in a marriage that's upside down, trying to figure it out and navigate some of these waters, my good friend, Gary Thomas, who I love deeply, and this man walks with the Lord and is probably one of the best scholars in the marriage and family space and even beyond that into spiritual disciplines. He says this, "A good marriage isn't something you find, it's something you make. And you have to keep on making it. Just as importantly (and herein lies the hope), you can also begin remaking it at any stage." And all God's people said... Amen.

Father, it is in the name of Jesus that I pray for the couple right now where the emotions and the experience feels like too much water under the bridge, and they don't know next steps, they don't know the plan. I pray for peace today that they walk out not allowing emotion or experience to be the driver anymore but going "Let's dig into this text. Let's really understand what it means to be a godly wife and a godly husband. Let's care for one another. Let's submit to one another as we've been taught and as we see clearly in the example and the model of Jesus."

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus and that spouse who has been living a godly life in front of the unsaved spouse, that today would be the day that he or she repents of their sins, confesses with their mouth Jesus is Lord and believes in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they would be saved.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus, and everyone agreed and said... Amen.