

Christ is the Head and Savior of His Bride

Ephesians 5:22-33, Second Sunday after Epiphany

January 17, 2010

Beloved of the Lord..... Marriage is both a divine institution and also a civil estate, namely it is an arrangement God has created for the good of mankind. While it is indeed a great earthly blessing it carries with it no particular spiritual blessings with spiritual benefits like Baptism or the Lord's Supper. We do not have to be married to be saved, nor does God forgive us of our sins if we are married, nor is our marriage valid only if performed by a minister in a church. We should not then make marriage into something more than it is, namely an earthly blessing of a temporary nature, nor do our marriages continue in heaven.

Having said all that God nevertheless uses both the headship in marriage, and the love which holds two together as one in marriage, as a type or picture of Christ and His Church. The relationship then between Christ the Bridegroom and His Bride the Church is a mystery of the most sublime and highest order, for our God Christ draws into His body His bride the Church, believing men, women, and children so that "we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones." We together through Christ are one Holy Christian and Apostolic Church: two become one. Even when God first created woman, Eve for Adam, their union was picture of Christ and His Church. John Gerhard of the 17th century writes, "You have a type of how the Lord Christ was to have His side opened up by a spear in Adam, who had his side opened by God, and from the rib which was taken from him was crafted a woman. Thus, as Christ fell into death's sleep on the cross, from His opened side flowed blood and water -- the two Holy Sacraments -- from which the Church, Christ's Bride, was built up." "Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word."

I. God's commandments for husbands and wives.

Therefore "wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord." The Greek word behind "submit" also means to obey or subordinate oneself. Thus wives have a God-given place in their marriage, namely they are under the authority of their husbands and to disobey is to sin. This position or place was given by God even before man's fall into sin. Adam was created first, then Eve from Adam. After the fall this subordinate position remained for God in I Timothy 2 declares, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not

deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."

How should a woman then regard her own husband? He is her head, the leader in their marriage to be followed, and his word rules their household as Christ's Word rules His Church. The wife is to see that "she reverence her husband", reveres him, holding him dear to her heart. "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives to their own husbands in EVERYthing." When a wife doesn't respect and obey, there are many arguments which damage the love between husband and wife. This strife can lead to a loveless marriage or divorce. Moreover, when a husband is not respected by his wife he often grows bitter inside against her, loving her less and less and this too increases the strife. Today's "women's lib" movement has ruined countless marriages and made many unhappy, miserable, and childless women. On the other hand, when a wife humbly obeys and recognizes her husband as her head, God is pleased and there is happiness in the home. Titus two teaches an obedient wife who is also meek, quiet, and of a gentle spirit is in the sight of God, "of great price" and her husband will love her all the more for it.

Naturally husbands have their commandment to. "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it." These likewise are very strong words and we as husbands better listen well and take heed. Do we love our wife as "Christ loved the church". We know we don't, for Christ's love for His Church was perfect, and our love for our own wife is imperfect, flawed, selfish, very stained by sin. Even if our love for our wife is strong by this world's standard - it is but a molehill in comparison to the Mt. Everest of God's love for His Bride. While it is true husbands are to be the head of their wives in marriage, this office comes with great responsibility. Husbands must then rule properly according to both wisdom and faith. Husbands who rule as tyrants will be judged as tyrants and Christ was not a tyrant to His Church but a Savior. All husbands then should look upon their wives as a most precious, high, and noble gift from God. By faith she is even a child of the Good Shepherd who even now carries her as a lamb in His gentle arms. Yet He who loves her has given her to you in marriage, that you as two may be one flesh. And "no man every yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church."

Dear husband, God is watching you, and seeing how you take care of her whom He yet loves from above. If you do her wrong, won't His wrath be kindled? If you love her less won't His anger grow? God desires you cherish her deeply in your heart as a most precious gift. You should love her just as much today as you did on your wedding day, even more so

after all these years. While she may be the weaker vessel, weaker in body or even weaker in spirit, that means you must be all the stronger in your love toward her, that though she is weak through you she will be strong. Just as when we are weak in the spirit, we need someone who is stronger to strengthen us with God's Word, so husbands must declare to their wives their love, and pour into that weaker vessel the strength of God's love, which is given by God's Word.

Thus in marriage God has ordained a certain order, and both husband and wife have their own particular duties. On this subject J. T. Mueller writes, "This divine order must not be subverted; for it is the will of God that the woman should not usurp authority over the man by ruling over him. But on the other hand, the woman should not be tyrannized or made a slave; for though she was not taken from the head of Adam to govern him, yet neither was she taken from his feet to be trodden under by him." Indeed the rib is close to the heart. Luther said: "Woman should be regarded with reverence; for she is God's handiwork. She was created that she might be a helpmeet for her husband, bring up children, and rear them in faith and piety."

II. Christ both rules and loves His Bride through the Word. Truly marriage is a picture of Christ the Bridegroom, and His Bride the Church. While Christ is the Head of His Church, the Bride is also His own body which He loves and cherishes. Speaking first as Christ being the Head of the Church, we know His Word has rule over us all. He is the Good Shepherd and we are the sheep. "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life." In the Christian Church, we who hear His voice by faith will be sure to obey His every Word. We do not recognize the voice of any other shepherd but God, and Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. We therefore obey His Ten Commandments and will not add to them nor subtract from them. Believing husbands will likewise love their wives as Christ loved the Church. Believing wives will reverence their husbands, as the Church reveres Christ. If we only want to obey some of God's commands but not all, we do not belong to Christian Church but the church of the devil. But if we love and know Christ by faith, that faith itself will compel us to sincerely obey all and sincerely repent when we have not. Jesus said, "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

In the Christian Church then since Christ alone is the head, we follow our pastor – the Servant of the Word – as long as he rightly declares to us God's Word. Thus the Bible says, "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves for they watch for your souls." Because of his office the pastor does have a

rule, but that rule only extends as far as God's Word. If he speaks to us God's Word we ought to listen but if he goes beyond the Word we dare not listen for this is not the voice of our Good Shepherd, but it is another voice. God's Word is higher than us all and Christ is the Head of the Church. Thus no pastor should have a personal following, and nobody should follow a pastor just because he is nice, friendly, etc. By the same token if a pastor is gruff, has sharp edges, is somewhat a slob, hurts our feelings, etc., if he yet teaches God's Word faithfully, we are to continue to follow that voice of our Good Shepherd which he teaches. In marriage it is likewise. All spouses have personal faults and things we don't like about them, but we still took a vow to love, honor, and cherish them in sickness and health, till death do us part.

Finally, why do we follow Christ as the head of the Church? Because He is the Savior of His Church, our Savior. "Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word." Namely it was the Word of our Good Shepherd, who in the Gospel Word washed us clean of all sin when we were baptized – the washing of water BY THE WORD. Thus in the picture of marriage, the Bride comes to the Groom in the dirt and filth of her sins, our sins. On our very wedding day we come to Him as adulterers and adulteresses, totally defiled, even loving sin. We were unfaithful though He was faithful. Being faithful He therefore had the right to put us away, to cast us away forever into the abyss of hell. Yet because the Bridegroom had espoused Himself to us by the promise of His Gospel, He does not put us away, but is instead lifted up high on the cross for all the world to see. He pays our price so that which is dirty is made clean.

Can you not now see the bright and clean wedding dress He has put upon you so that you have no spot or wrinkle or any such thing? Can you not now see yourself as God sees you: holy and righteous through Christ, your holy and righteous Groom? Indeed to believe is to see God has clothed you with His own holiness! And since His holiness is counted as your own, all your sins against your spouse are truly forgiven, your lack of love or lack of obedience. What then will we give Him in return? Husbands love your wives and wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. Amen.