



THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

September 30, 2012

“God-Pleasing Spousal Submission – The Proper Relationship of Husband and Wife”

Sermon Text: Ephesians 5:17, 21-31

“Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is...

...Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as 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, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.”

Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

The past few Sundays we have been giving our attention to the Lord's Prayer. One of the things we learned about the Lord's Prayer is that when we pray it, we are not just praying for each of us as individuals, but for each other as well. We are not to be thinking only of ourselves when making our requests to our heavenly Father, rather we ought to ask God to bless our neighbor as well.

This we do out of sincere love and gratitude to our God for the suffering and death of His Son Jesus Christ upon the cross. For it is Christ alone who, being true God and true man, was able and did willingly sacrifice Himself to redeem you and me from everlasting torment in the fires of Hell, which we all deserve on account of our sins. And this, to bring us as children of God and Jesus' own brothers and sisters home with Him into the God's heavenly Kingdom.

It is in this same spirit of brotherhood with Christ, of humble thankfulness and sincere love for our Savior Jesus Christ, that our sermon text would urge and encourage us to deal with one another in love as fellow Christians, motivated by what God in Christ has done for us and for our salvation.

Dear Friends, we love God because He first loved us and sent His Son *not to be served, but to serve* us as our Savior from Sin and Death. And so, this Gospel of Jesus Christ is the reason – *it is our motivation and the ultimate example of service to others we will want to emulate* – in submitting ourselves to each other as Christian brothers and sisters in this life. Hence, without regard to what

the world would dictate or expect of us in this so-called *modern* age, we submit to one another out of sincere love, gratitude, reverence and respect for Christ and His sacrifice. This is, in the right sense, what is meant by 'the fear of God' for the Christian.

And so what Saint Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians is applicable to all Christians everywhere, *in this our day too*, no matter what our relationship with each other might be. For he writes in verse 21 of our text that (all) Christians are to submit "... *one to another in the fear of God.*"

Motivated by what God has done for us in Christ Jesus, we will want to emulate this same caring and loving submission to one another – in *all* our relationships, but *especially* in our marriages.

With this in mind, we will want to learn and follow the example of our Lord and King, Jesus Christ in *His* relationship with *His* Bride, the Church. And so, the Apostle Paul moves to specifically address what the proper relationship of the Christian husband and wife is to be.

Now, we can easily see from Paul's letter that our marriages are to be Christ-centered and our behavior towards one another in that relationship as husband and wife, Gospel motivated. But do we know what it means *to submit* to our spouses in a God-pleasing way?

And so, in the light of this Scriptural truth, we begin our examination of the proper relationship of husband and wife. We will examine:

- Firstly: How, and to what extent, Christian wives are to submit to their husbands; and
- Secondly: How, and to what extent, Christian husbands are to submit to their wives.

Saint Paul expands upon his God inspired admonition to *all* Christians to submit to each other in the fear of God, by first calling upon the Christian wife to take up the role in marriage God has given her. He says in verse 22 and 23: "*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and He is the savior of the body.*"

Here God's Word is clear. There can be no mistaking what the role of the Christian wife is to be in relation to her husband. God tells her to submit to her husband as unto the Lord Jesus Christ.

This, of course, is not an unwilling subjection to her husband as a slave or forced worker is coerced into submitting to the whims and commands of her master. No, rather the wife's submission to her husband is a willing obedience motivated by the love and sincere thankfulness which flows from her heart for the undeserved grace of God given her in the suffering and death of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Christian wife willingly renders loving obedience to her husband as she would unto Christ by virtue of her faith in the saving grace of God; and, indeed, *IS* rendering obedience to God in rendering obedience to her own husband.

For the Christian wife renders obedience to her husband NOT because he is necessarily superior to her in any way, but because God set down at the time of creation the position she is to assume in the marital relationship.

After the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, God tells Eve in Genesis 3:16 that one of the results of her sin is this: "... *I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.*"

St. Paul is moved by the Holy Spirit to write why the believing wife is to be subject to her husband in verse 23: "*For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the savior of the body.*" So, it is God's will that the Christian wife is to give willing obedience to her husband in the same way that the Church, Christ's Body, is to render obedience to its head, Christ.

And lest there be any doubt as to what has just been stated, St. Paul reiterates what he has just written, with verse 24: "*Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*" Just as the church is to be obedient to the Word of God in all things, so too, the believing wife is to be obedient to her own husband *in everything*.

No where does God's Word make any allowances for the advent of the women's liberation movement. No where in Scripture does God give the wife latitude to make arbitrary exceptions to her husband's headship, countermanning the husband's voice, based simply on what she feels or wants. For while the woman is equal to the man before God – having been made co-heir with the man in the blessed assurance of eternal life through the salvation which is in Christ Jesus – yet she is to be subject to her husband, just as the Church, Christ's Bride, is subject to Christ. This is God's command and we know God does not change and neither does His Word to accommodate the 'wisdom' of men.

On the other hand, God is NOT here giving you husbands a license to speak to your wives as though she were a child, or worse yet, something less than another precious human soul. Nor are you to treat her as some lowly slave – to be ordered about – as though she is only here to serve your every whim.

No, in fact, just the opposite! For the Holy Spirit next moves St. Paul to address how husbands are to *serve* their wives.

That's right, men. It is God's will that you *serve* your wife!

For we read in verse 25 through 27 of our text: "*Husbands, love your wives, even as 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, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*"

Now, My Dear Friends, to what extent did Christ love the Church?

Did not Christ willingly give up any thought of His own desires, His own comfort, and His own well being for the sake of His bride, the Church?

In fact, Jesus Christ suffered severe mental and physical torture and ultimately selflessly sacrificed His own life's blood on the Cross of Calvary, so that in fulfilling the Father's Will, He might present His Bride to Himself as pure and Holy, without spiritual defect.

Now while in the case of Christ and the Church, Christ *is* the superior; you husbands are *not* spiritually superior to your wives! The woman is *NOT* inferior to the man in Christ's Kingdom. She is an heir with Christ and a precious child of God. And men, you'd better treat her as such, else you will call down upon yourself the righteous wrath of Almighty God, who made and redeemed the both of you at so great a cost!

So as Christ loved the Church, you husbands ought to love your wives – willingly giving your all to the physical, emotional and spiritual well being of your wife. You may never be called upon to suffer torture or sacrifice your life for her, but you should *always* have her best interests at heart.

You should love, honor and truly cherish her; for she is a good and gracious gift from God. Witness Solomon's observance in Proverbs 18:22: "*Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord.*"

Continuing in our text, We find St. Paul reiterating and expanding upon what he is telling us about the husband's position in the marriage relationship.

We read verses 28-31 of our text: "*So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.*"

Once again, we husbands are led to look upon the example of Christ's relationship with His Church and emulate that in our own marriage relationship with our wife. Christ *loves and cherishes* the Church and so ought the bridegroom love and cherish *his* bride.

Christ also nourishes and continues to build up His Church through the faithful preaching of His Word and the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And it is with this in mind that St. Paul is moved by the Holy Spirit to write that you who are now husbands (or will be at some time in the future) ought to nourish, build up and cherish your wives as you do *your own* bodies.

It is then not a matter of choice, but rather a matter of Christian duty – a matter of a most serious obligation you, dear Christian husband, have towards your wife. For just as you most assuredly don't hate your own body, but rather take care of it by feeding, clothing and protecting it with all good things, so too, you are commanded by God to do the same in Christian love for your wife – just as Christ graciously cares for and preserves His bride, the Church.

Now it is true, men are incapable of attaining the degree of love for their wives that Christ has shown the Church. Yet every Christian husband has set before him in the God's Word the perfect example to follow in his relationship with his wife – Christ's amazing selfless, sacrificial love for His bride, the Church.

And so it is that Paul here tells us that as Christ's Church – *all believers* – are by the Grace of God in Christ, truly members of Christ's body – members of His flesh and of His bones. For, just as husband and wife leave their parents to be joined together in marriage *as one flesh* and all previous relationships necessarily take second place to that marriage relationship; so too are we thus intimately bound unto Christ. For through the costly redemption that is ours in Christ Jesus, as His bride, the Church we are *truly* members of His own body.

And so, Dear Friends – dear Christian husband and wife – as you look to Christ Jesus and *in Him alone* do anchor your faith, in like manner:

You, dear Christian husband, look to your Savior and emulate *His* sacrificial love for *His* bride. Look to *His* nourishing of *His* bride and the way He so selflessly has cherished her and preserved her in Truth through the years. This is how you, dear Christian husband, are to submit to your wife in the fear of God.

And you, dear Christian wife, look to the sure hope of your salvation in Christ Jesus as motivation for godly submission to your own husbands, emulating the willing obedience of Christ's Bride, the Church to God's Word in all things.

If both husband and wife will faithfully do this – if you will make Christ the centering focus of your marriage relationship and His Gospel of forgiveness the motivation for your behavior towards one another – this will result in a God-pleasing marital relationship with your spouse and you will indeed be wise, having fulfilled the will of your heavenly Father in your marriage relationship.

Amen.

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And now may the love and peace of God which far surpasses all human understand, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, who loved the church, and gave Himself for it. Amen.