

August 2, 2015 – Ephesians 5:22-33 (OT: Isaiah 29:11-19 NT: Acts Mark 7:1-13)

*Christ and the Church is a Model of Marriage
and Marriage is a Model of Christ and the Church*

- *A model of love*
- *A model of submission*

Housing developers and apartment complexes often have a furnished unit set aside to serve as a model home or apartment. These are designed to entice you to move in by showing you what things could look like if you lived there. Of course the reality can be very different. Usually no one lives in these units so they are never messy. And our furnishings are often not as new or even as nice as the ones in the model, so our homes may not bear much resemblance to the ones in the brochure.

In Ephesians 5:22-33 God shows us models of marriage and our relationship to Jesus Christ. God uses each as a model for the other, so that Christ and the church is a model of marriage and marriage is a model of Christ and the church. Each one is a model of love and a model of submission.

It seems that the first three verses of this section often get the most attention: *“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything”* (vv. 22-24). People don’t like the idea that a wife should submit to her husband; it goes against our modern culture’s idea that spouses should be “equal” in a marriage (whatever that means). The idea of the husband being the head of the wife seems out-dated and open to abuse, and to many, simply offensive.

But most of the words in this section are spent talking about the husband and his role. Verse 25 says, *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.”* God calls a husband to love his wife to the point of sacrificing himself for her. To me, self-sacrifice seems much more demanding than submission!

Here Christ’s love for the church is held out as the model for a husband’s love for his wife. Christ *“loved the church and gave Himself for her.”* He willingly went to His excruciating death on the cross for you, to pay for your sins. He did this that He might sanctify and cleanse you from your sins with the washing of water by the word (v. 26).

This refers to baptism, *“the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”* (Titus 3:5). In baptism, your old sinful self was buried with Christ (Romans 6:3) and you were sanctified, cleansed and made new (see 1 Corinthians 6:11, 2 Corinthians 5:17). Jesus does all this in baptism so that He can present you *“to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing”*, so that you are *“holy and without blemish”* (v. 27).

Jesus’ willingness to sacrifice Himself and His adorning the church with glory is a model of how a husband is to love his wife. But if that is too lofty of an example, God gives us another one here that is more “down to earth” so to speak: the model of the body. After the description of what Jesus did for the church, we read in verses 28-29, *“So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.”*

While there may be things we don’t like about our bodies, when it comes right down to it, we don’t hate our own flesh. We naturally feed and take care of ourselves. When we are threatened,

we protect ourselves. In the same way a husband is to nourish, cherish and protect his wife. He is to care for his wife as his own body.

But this again is a model of the Lord Jesus and His church. Just as we nourish and cherish our own bodies, so does the Lord nourish and cherish us. *“For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones”* (v. 30). This description of the church as Christ’s body appears a number of times in the book of Ephesians. It shows just how closely Jesus identifies with us. He who is God humbled Himself and became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). He took our flesh and bones upon Himself and became man.

Verse 31 quotes Genesis 2:24 where God established marriage: *“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* We usually (and correctly) take this to refer to the union of a husband and wife, but Paul goes on to say: *“This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church”* (v. 32)!

Who would of thought that the union of a husband and wife had any correspondence to Jesus’ union with us? But it does! That is why it is here called a mystery; it something we would not have come up with ourselves, but it had be revealed to us by God. And this mystery is great! In these verses the intimacy the church has with Christ is described as the close connection (even the inseparableness) of the the body with head and as the joining and intimacy of a wife and her husband. This unity is something that we all have and can enjoy with Christ, *“the Savior of the body”* (v. 23).

After reaching the height of our relationship with Jesus, this section ends by returning to where it started: the relationship of a husband and his wife: *“Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband”* (v. 33).

We’ve talked a lot about a husband’s relationship to his wife and Christ’s relationship to the church because it can help us understand and put into proper context what God here says to wives.

This section started with the admonition: *“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord”* (v. 22). This is a voluntary self-submission, not a subjugation. It is to be done *“as to the Lord”* – to be done out of love and obedience to God as His will for a marriage. It is God’s will for marriage because marriage is to be a picture of the church’s relationship to Christ: *“For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”* (vv. 23-24).

Does it bother you that Christ is the head of the church? Shouldn’t the church and Jesus be “equal”? Shouldn’t we have just as much say as Jesus? From history we have seen the problems that arise when the church sets itself up as being equal to Jesus and what happens when it claims that what it says has as much authority as what Jesus says. Martin Luther worked hard to restore Christ as the head of the church, not His supposed vicar, and to restore Jesus as Savior of the church. I don’t know about you, but I’d rather have God be in charge than me.

If it doesn’t bother us that Christ is the head of the church – that He is our head – and that we subject ourselves to Him, why are we bothered by the words here that the husband is head of the wife and that wives are to be subject to their own husbands in everything? As I said before it because our culture that says that this is wrong. The world around us equates headship with superiority and submission with inferiority. But that is not what God means.

We see this from 1 Corinthians 15:21, which says, *“Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God*

may be all in all.” This verse tells us that Jesus will be subject to the Father. It uses the same word that Ephesians uses to refer to a wife being subject to her husband. Jesus is not inferior to the Father. He and the Father are one. Jesus is equal to God.

Similarly a wife’s submission to her husband does not mean she is inferior to her husband. The wife and the husband are one flesh. God has placed the husband in the position of being the head in marriage because this arrangement is an image of Christ and the church. By loving his wife, a husband demonstrates Christ’s love for the church and by submitting to her husband, a wife demonstrates the church’s submission to Christ.

And just as the church being subject to Christ is not a bad thing, neither is a wife being subject to her husband. This is especially true when we remember the role the husband is to have in the marriage: to love his wife as himself to the point of giving himself up for her; he is to nourish and cherish her as his own body. Submission to a Christ-like husband is a joy and a blessing.

It is easy to love a wife who submits and respects you. And it is easy to submit to and respect a loving husband. But life doesn’t always live up to the model, does it? Things can get messy. Because of sin wives seek to rule their husbands and refuse to lovingly submit themselves and husband can be domineering, unloving, and even demand obedience.

When this happens we can easily point the finger of blame at the other person and say, “If they would do what God wants, I could do what God wants.” You don’t have to be married to respond this way either. All of us have probably said at one time or another something like: “I’ll apologize if he does!” But blaming the other person does no good. It only leads to a downward spiral. The model of the body shows us how unhelpful it is to blame the other person. If part of your body gets injured and causes you pain, what do you do? Do you get angry at it? Of course not. You take care of it and protect it.

And remember the model of Christ and the church. Praise God that He did not wait until we were doing what we should be doing before He loved us. But while we were still rebellious sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). He loves us even when we are not lovable. He nourishes and cherishes us even though we don’t deserve it. He doesn’t *demand* our obedience by His authority but by the riches of His kindness, forbearance and patience He leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Christ and the church is a model of marriage. Christ gave Himself for the church. He is the model of the self-sacrificing love a husband is to have for his wife. Just as we nourish and cherish our bodies, and Christ nourishes and cherishes us as His body, so a husband is to care for his wife.

As Christ is the head of the church and the church is subject to Him, so a wife is to submit to and respect her husband, and let him love and provide for her, as Christ loves and provides for the church.

And the unity and intimacy of marriage is a model of the intimacy and unity you have with Christ. He has sanctified you and cleansed you with the washing of water by the word and has presented you to Himself a glorious church, holy and without spot. May we willingly submit to Him who is our head and our Savior. Amen.

Rock of Ages Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.GrandRapidsLutheran.org

Pastor Peter T. Evensen

616-322-9167 (cell) – peterevensen@icloud.com