

## A MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP PATTERNED AFTER OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST

Sermon for the 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 2018

Ephesians 5:22-33

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the second Reading from before, Ephesians 5:22-33: **<sup>22</sup> Wives, be subordinate to your own husbands as to the Lord! <sup>23</sup> For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is also the Head of the church, His body, of which He is the Saviour; <sup>24</sup> but, as the church is subordinate to Christ, so also wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything! <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that He might make the church holy, by making her clean with the Washing of water by the Word! <sup>27</sup> He did this that He might present her to Himself as a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or any other such blemish, but that she might be holy and without fault. <sup>28</sup> In this way husbands also ought to love their own wives, as their own bodies. A man who loves his own wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one has ever hated his own flesh. Rather, everyone feeds his body and treats it tenderly, as Christ also does the church. <sup>30</sup> For we are members of His body. <sup>31</sup> “This is why a man will leave his father and mother and remain united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup> This mystery is great. However, I speak of it with reference to Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> However, each one of you husbands should love his own wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Marriage certainly ranks among God’s greatest gifts to mankind. It should be honoured and upheld among us in view of its *importance* to our society and held sacred in our midst in view of its divine origin. That is especially true in view of the confusion that surrounds marriage within our society today. Our society is trying to sever the institution of marriage - its definition and its design - from its divine origin. Sinful man claims the right to do with marriage what he wills. The unfortunate results of his efforts are evident all around us as holy matrimony has become anything but holy, and the landscape of our country is now littered with broken hearts and broken relationships.

Therefore, it is important that we uphold God’s institution of marriage. That means publicly preaching and teaching the truths of God’s Word concerning marriage and privately upholding those truths within our individual lives. Sadly, however, we all too often settle for less than the best. While we profess to believe and accept the truths God has revealed in Scripture concerning marriage, we very often allow the attitudes of the world to shape our actual marital practices. This ought not be! Any marriage relationship must be patterned after our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Before we address the pattern for our marriage relationships spoken by the apostle Paul, let us consider for just a few moments two important issues: first, the world’s unfortunate distortion of biblical marriage; and, second, God’s intentions regarding mankind’s purpose in this world and its connection to marriage.

When the world thinks of biblical marriage, it so often thinks of an overbearing man imposing his will on a weak and abused woman. Such thinking misunderstands both the headship principles established by God for husbands and the biblical call for subordination by a wife. The biblical principle of headship for husbands does not involve the use of force, or the goal of control, or the selfish imposition of the husband’s will. Rather, it involves Christ-like leadership, Christ-life love, and the acceptance of responsibility for both before God. Likewise, the biblical principle of subordination by the wife does not imply weakness or inferiority on her part, nor does it involve the absence of power leading to subjection. Rather, it involves the active decision of a wife to accept the order established by God for marriage - a decision made in view of her trust in God and her desire to help accomplish the goals God has for the married couple.

Now, regarding God’s intentions for mankind’s purpose and for married partners - in order to understand them, we must go all the way back to creation. God created human beings to be His representatives on this earth. God gave mankind dominion over His creation, so that we might care for it.<sup>1</sup> The introduction of sin into the world did not change God’s intentions regarding man’s position and responsibility in this world, but it radically changed man’s approach to that position and responsibility. Instead of trusting in God for his personal well-being and honouring God

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:26

by faithfully fulfilling his calling, sinful man mistrusted God and began seeking his own well-being. The selfish pursuit of personal desires and individual security became man's focus, rather than the honour of God and the welfare of all of creation. While marriage was intended by God as the basic unit of society and a means of populating the earth, it was also His plan for organising mankind's efforts to care for this earth. He would call individuals to our various areas of endeavour - teaching, building, farming, finance - with this goal in mind that every man would have a helper - a companion, and together they would become more effective than either of them might be alone. The only change God made after the fall into sin was His decision that our ultimate future and goal as human beings would not be tied to this world, but rather to the world to come in heaven. Unfortunately, we human beings, including we Christians, often fail to see the big picture regarding God's purpose for marriage, and so fail to see the beauty and the wisdom of God's plan. God has great things planned for each of us to do in this world before He takes us home to heaven. Marriage is both a gift from God to us and a means by which He intended to help us become more effective in our individual callings!

Having now considered those two issues, let us consider God's intentions for marriage.

Wives: submit yourself in trust and with respect to the leadership of your husbands, as you do to the leadership of your Lord! Paul writes, <sup>22</sup> **Wives, be subordinate to your own husbands as to the Lord!** <sup>23</sup> **For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is also the Head of the church, His body, of which He is the Saviour;** <sup>24</sup> **but, as the church is subordinate to Christ, so also wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything!... and the wife must respect her husband.**

Dear Christian women, God's call to be subordinate within marriage is not, as mentioned before, a sign of weakness or inferiority. The biblical concept of subordination does not imply inferiority. Nor is it to be imposed by husbands. Rather it is to be a decision you make in connection with your faith in God. As you subordinate yourself to Jesus as a member of His Church, trusting in Him both to lead you wisely and bless you richly, so God calls upon you to **be subordinate** to the leadership of your husband and thereby receive blessing from your Saviour's hands. Wives are called upon by Christ to exercise a "self-submitting love" over against their husbands. Jesus, who is equal to His Father in power and glory, was subordinate to God with regard to His plan for our salvation. He accepted God's will and accepted the position of Saviour. He then ordered His life in such a way on this earth that He might provide us with righteousness while removing from us our sins. In the same way wives are called upon by God to organise themselves under the leadership of their husband, so that together they might accomplish everything that God has given them to do. Within marriage the two are to become one, making themselves stronger than either individually, and so better able to accomplish their objectives. Wise wives will trust God, honour His will, and respect their husbands, knowing that God's plan for marriage will bring them the greatest possible blessing!

Husbands: lead your wives and love them sacrificially as Christ leads and loves you! Paul writes, <sup>23</sup> **For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is also the Head of the church...** <sup>25</sup> **Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,** <sup>26</sup> **that He might make the church holy, by making her clean with the Washing of water by the Word!** <sup>27</sup> **He did this that He might present her to Himself as a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or any other such blemish, but that she might be holy and without fault.**

Christian men and, in particular, husbands - notice that both your role and the fulfillment of your responsibilities are patterned after Christ's relationship with you. You are to lead your wife as Christ leads the Church, of which you are a part. Christ leads the Church with wisdom and grace, and with its best interests at heart. Christ is not selfish, but self-sacrificing. He does not force His will upon us, but rather draws us with His love. John writes, "*We love Him, because He first loved us,*" (1 John 4:19), not "*we love Him, because He is twisting our arms behind our backs... (or) because if we do not He will beat us up!*" No, Christ has a long-range plan for each of us, and He leads us by moving our hearts with His precious Word and convincing us that He is indeed trustworthy and worthy to be followed!

It is imperative, therefore, that we Christian men prayerfully approach our God so that we are led to a proper understanding of our callings. We cannot lead properly, if we do not know where we are going! Our ultimate goal is held in common - we want our wives, our children, and ourselves to enjoy the gift of heaven. While we are here on this earth, we are to seek God's guidance regarding our particular callings within our marriages, our families, our congregations, and our community. Those callings will differ, but they will have this in common - our words and actions ought to be intended to bring blessing to others and to honour our God.

In addition, our responsibility before God within marriage is to love - to love in a self-sacrificing manner, as did Jesus, who went to the cross for us. Love is more than an emotion. It is also a decision of the will and involves the careful analysis of needs and a determined plan of action to meet needs. Jesus **loved the church and gave Himself up for her. By making her clean with the Washing of water by the Word** He prepares the Church for its brilliant future throughout eternity. His concern is meeting our present need and planning a blessed future. Even so, we are to love - honouring our wives as gifts given from God, recognising that they play an important role in helping us accomplish our God-given and mutual callings. There is nothing that wives want more from their husbands than a deep, abiding, and on-going love. When you provide such love, Paul says, a **man who loves his own wife loves himself**, for he is one with his wife. On the contrary, when you fail to love your wife, you indeed hate yourself!

Dear friends in Christ, marriage is a divine institution, which forms the basis for the family, the basic unit of every society. Let us always strive for the best, that is, a marriage relationship patterned after our relationship with Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, heavenly Father, You have raised from death the Lord Jesus, our great Shepherd, because His death fulfilled Your eternal covenant to save us from sin. We praise You for Your marvellous love and goodness, and pray that You would give us everything we need to know and do Your will, and to live to Your honour and praise. Come into our lives with the power of Your Holy Spirit. Renew in us a true and living faith in Jesus Christ Your Son, so that we may be completely united with Him, trusting not in our own goodness, but in the righteousness based on His death for us.

Keep us from fearing, loving, and trusting anyone or anything more than You. Fill us with love for You, which expresses itself in humble, loving service to our neighbours. Help us to act justly, to love mercy, and to live humbly before You, our God. Move us to show respect to everybody, to be generous to the needy, to share the burdens of the weak, and to act in sincere love to all people. Help us to pattern our lives on Jesus Christ. Make our words sincere and edifying, our lives pure and godly, and our relationships with others peaceful and harmonious.

Make Your Church so aware of Your countless blessings, especially the gift of the Gospel, that it may continually respond with thanks and praise. Inspire Your people to proclaim Christ's saving love to all mankind. Give pastors a true understanding of Your Word. Give wise judgment to those in positions of leadership. Give us all a loving compassion to people in need.

Bless our country and its people, that mercy, truth, uprightness, and peace may be evident everywhere. Give us leaders whose concern is not to serve personal pride or party loyalties, but to be Your instruments of service to all.

Fill our homes with the joy of Your presence. Inspire parents with the Spirit of Christ, so that they may encourage their children by word and example to live godly lives and to find joy in serving You and their fellowmen.

Bless all good and useful employment. Give to all both satisfaction in what they do and a fair reward for their efforts. Teach people in all situations to remember that they are accountable to You for every word and action.

Look with pity on those who are facing trouble and trials, especially those Christians who are suffering for the sake of their faith. Strengthen all the needy by Your mighty power, that they may remember that You are their only saviour and help.

Hear our prayers for Jesus' sake, O Lord, that we may praise You for ever and ever. Amen.

#### 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 29:11-19

<sup>11</sup> The vision about all this will become like the words in a sealed scroll for you. If people give the scroll to a man who can read and tell him, "Please read this!" he answers, "I cannot. For it is sealed." <sup>12</sup> If the scroll is given to someone who cannot read, and he is told, "Please read this!" he answers, "I do not know how to read."

<sup>13</sup> The Lord has said: "Because this people has been coming near Me with their mouths and has been honouring Me with their lips, while their hearts have been keeping far away from Me, and their fear of Me is a commandment of men that has been taught them, <sup>14</sup> Therefore, look! I shall again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder on wonder. The wisdom of their wise men will become lost, and the intelligence of their intelligent men will be hidden."

<sup>15</sup> How horrible it will be for those who bury their plans deeply to conceal them from the LORD! Their deeds are done in the dark, and they ask, "Who sees us? Who knows us?" <sup>16</sup> Such is your perversity! Should the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing that is made should say about the one who has made it, "He did not make me," or that a thing that is shaped should say about him who has shaped it, "He has not been intelligent"? <sup>17</sup> Is it not just a little while until Lebanon changes into a fertile land, and the fertile land is regarded as a forest? <sup>18</sup> On that day the deaf people will hear the Words of a scroll and, out of gloom and darkness, the eyes of blind people will begin to see. <sup>19</sup> Humble people will have joy after joy in the LORD, and the poorest of people will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."

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#### Mark 7:1-13

<sup>1</sup> The Pharisees and some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. <sup>2</sup> They saw that some of His disciples were eating their food with 'defiled' hands, that is, without washing them. <sup>3</sup> For the Pharisees, like all other Jews, do not eat without washing their hands up to the wrist, to follow the

tradition of their elders. <sup>4</sup> When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat without first washing, and there are many other things that they have had handed on to them and observe, such as the washing of cups, pitchers, brass pots and couches. <sup>5</sup> The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him: "Why do Your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders but eat bread with defiled hands?"

<sup>6</sup> He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites, as the Scriptures say: 'This people honours Me with its lips, but its hearts are far from Me. <sup>7</sup> They worship Me in vain, since what they teach as doctrines are the commandments of men.' <sup>8</sup> You have abandoned the Commandment of God but hold on to the tradition of men."

<sup>9</sup> He told them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the Commandment of God to establish your own tradition! <sup>10</sup> For Moses said: 'Honour your father and your mother!' and 'Let the person who speaks evil of father or mother be put to death!' <sup>11</sup> However, you say, 'If anyone says to his father or mother, "Anything by which I might have helped you is Corban (that is, a gift to God)," <sup>12</sup> then you do not let him do any-thing for his father or his mother any longer. <sup>13</sup> You make the Word of God of no effect by the tradition that you have handed down. You also do many other things like that."