

The Proper Relation Between Husband And Wife.

Text: Eph. 5:22-33

Suggested Hymns:

359, 344, 587, 848, 164

- 1) Is Illustrated And Exalted By A Comparison
To The Relationship Between Christ And The Church
- 2) Considered From The Opposite Viewpoint
Of The Wife And The Husband

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 Ephesians 5:22–33, ²² *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* ²³ *For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.* ²⁴ *Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*

²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,* ²⁶ *that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,* ²⁷ *that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

²⁸ *So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.* ²⁹ *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.* ³⁰ *For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.* ³¹ *“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”*

³² *This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.* ³³ *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.* (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Last Sunday we learned from the Word of God how a happy Christian home is to be founded. *Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*¹

But the successful founding of a home does not assure its permanent prosperity and happiness. Having made their beginning in the name of Jesus, the founders of the home must also continue therein. This implies that they conduct their home-life in strict conformity with the Word of God.

The fundamental problem of the married estate is contained in the question, “*What is the proper relation between husband and wife?*” This problem is encountered on the very threshold of the new home.

It must be solved. And unless it is solved speedily and in the light of Holy Scriptures, there will be a dwarfed and blighted home-life, bitter disappointment, endless grief, and at length perhaps even divorce. This is the factor on which many marriages break down.

Let us now consider *The Proper Relation Between Husband and Wife*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Proper Relation Between Husband And Wife Is Illustrated And Exalted By A Comparison To The Relationship Between Christ And The Church

In portraying the ideal marriage relation, St. Paul likens it to the unique relationship existing between Christ and the Church. Thus the apostle provides husbands and wives with a perfect and inspiring pattern.

The essence of the relationship between Christ and the Church is love. Our text says in verse 23, *Christ also loved the church*. This was not a theoretical, empty-handed love, for He “*gave Himself for her*,” and that not merely in part or for a season, but completely and permanently.

And why did He give Himself? That He might be the Saviour of the Church, and that the Church through Him might be sanctified and cleansed. Having given Himself for the Church, the Church belongs to Him. Hence He *nourishes and cherishes it*.

By the means of grace He continues to cleanse, sanctify, and adorn it in order that the Church, as His bride, may in due time be presented to Him immaculate, holy, and glorious.

This is also expressed in Ephesians 1:4, *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.*²

Such is the marvellous, self-sacrificing love of Jesus. His chief concern is not His own person, but the Church and its salvation.

The Church, in turn, loves Jesus. We read in 1 John 4:19 that ¹⁹ *We love Him because He first loved us*, not indeed with a perfect love, but with a sincere love that earnestly strives for perfection.

The hymnist wrote:³

Thee will I love, my life, my Saviour,
Who art my best and truest friend;
Thee will I love and praise for ever,
For never shall Thy kindness end;
Thee will I love with all my heart,
For Thou my bridegroom art.

Nevertheless, as our text says “*Christ is head of the church*, and “*the church is subject to Christ.*” Note that this subordination of the Church to Christ is the direct result of their mutual love. Without love this relationship would be impossible.

“*Christ is the Head,*” only by reason of His love and for the purpose of exercising it to the fullest extent. He does not rule the Church with the iron hand of the Law. There is no coercion, no tyranny; for in this kingdom the sole law is love, the sole government is by means of the Gospel, and the sole aim is the salvation of the sinner. This is the Kingdom of Grace.

“*The church is subject to Christ,*” but in love. This is a voluntary, cheerful subjection, the adoring submission of the regenerated soul, a willing and eager service, and a blessed privilege. We read in Psalm 40:8, ⁸ *I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart.*⁴

The true believer glories in the fact that he is a servant of Jesus Christ. St. Paul was a servant of Christ as we read in Romans 15:15–16, ¹⁵ *Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, ¹⁶ that I might be a minister of Jesus*

Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

This beautiful relationship between Christ and the Church is chosen by the apostle as the best pattern for the relationship between husband and wife. Thus the marriage relationship is highly exalted. Furthermore, as our text says, it is “*a great mystery,*” a type or illustration of the relationship between Christ and the Church.

2. The Proper Relation Between Husband And Wife Considered From The Opposite Viewpoint Of The Wife And The husband

The basis of the successful marriage is love, *Husbands, love your wives*. Where love is lacking, there can be no happiness in the home. How foolish therefore to marry for wealth, social advancement, mere expediency, or even sensual gratification!

Where husband and wife are united by faith in Christ, their love for each other will be refined, deepened, and sanctified, for it will consistently pattern itself after Jesus, the ideal Bridegroom.

This means that “*the husband is head of the wife,*” and *as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything*. There is to be a well-organised and sympathetic co-operation between husband and wife, the husband being “*the head*” and the wife a helper comparable to him, a helper fit for him.⁵ A complementary counterpart.

This conception of the marriage relationship is contrary to the popular idea of “a team.” In this day of the liberation of women, such an idea it is regarded as antiquated, barbarous, pernicious, and unworkable. Even in Christian homes it is often ignored or even discarded altogether.

But remember: the subjection of the wife to the husband is commanded by God. He is the best organiser after all, and He knows that every organisation, in order to function properly, must have one head; also the family. Where this God-given rule and fundamental principle of organisation is violated or discarded, there will always be confusion and sorrow.

Considered from the viewpoint of the wife. ²² *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* ²³ *For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.* ²⁴ *Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. ... let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

Note that this statement concerning the headship of the husband is addressed to the wife and not to the husband.

She is reminded that:

a) the husband is the head.⁶ We also read in Genesis 3:16, ¹⁶ *To the woman He said: Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.*⁷

Also in 1 Corinthians 11:3, ³ *But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.* And in verses 7–8, ⁷ *For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.* ⁸ *For man is not from woman, but woman from man.*

b) she must therefore submit herself to him. Verse 22 says, *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord*, and respect him.⁸

We read in Colossians 3:18, ¹⁸ *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.* And in 1 Timothy 2:11, ¹¹ *Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.*

Likewise 1 Peter 3:1, ¹ *Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives*, and in verses 5–6, ⁵ *For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,* ⁶ *as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.*

c) she is to be subject in everything,⁹ that is, in everything pertaining to the marriage estate, but not in spiritual things.¹⁰

d) it should be a free, willing, joyful subjection, patterned after the Church's subjection to Christ and prompted, not by law or the force of circumstances, but by unadulterated love.

e) she serves the Lord by being subject to her husband, as verse 22 tells us. The wife's subjection to her husband is part of her Christian conduct.¹¹

Considered from the viewpoint of the husband. ²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,* ²⁶ *that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,* ²⁷ *that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

²⁸ *So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.* ²⁹ *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.* ³⁰ *For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.* ³¹ *“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”*

a) St. Paul stresses that the chief duty of the husband toward the wife is love.¹² Likewise in Colossians 3:19, ¹⁹ *Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.* He is to love her “as himself,” “as his own body.”¹³ This is a moral obligation, and a natural, self-evident thing, *For no one ever hated his own flesh.*

b) The apostle, moreover, shows that the headship of the husband brings with it a greater responsibility and necessitates greater sacrifices. While the wife finds a pattern for her attitude toward her husband in the Church's attitude toward Christ, the husband is to pattern his attitude toward his wife after Christ's attitude toward the Church.

Note the difference. This implies giving himself to and for his wife in the fullest sense of the words, providing for her and protecting her, advancing her interests with self-effacing devotion (which means keeping himself in the background), regarding her as his most precious treasure, his glory and his joy, and, last, but not least, exercising his headship not as a dictator, who compels obedience by the threats and penalties of the law, but as one who “*draws with bands of love.*”¹⁴

We read of Jesus in John 12:32, ³² *And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.*”

This, then, is the proper relationship between husband and wife, as outlined in the Holy Scriptures. Far from being antiquated, barbarous, pernicious, and unworkable, it is the only ideal marriage relationship — beautiful, satisfying, inspiring, and practicable. Where this relationship is maintained, happiness in the home will not be wanting.

Let us recall Jesus being invited to the wedding in Cana recorded in John 2:1-2. *On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee ... Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.* The bridal couple in Cana were fortunate to have Jesus bless their wedded life. It makes a world of difference whether or not Jesus is invited to our weddings and into our homes. He is able to provide for all our needs and to transform our homes into havens of laughter and cheer.

There is no spot on earth so beautiful as a home with loving parents and happy obedient children, united in the bond of Christ's love. Jesus, no doubt, was a friend of the bridal couple. It is of utmost importance that we learn to know Jesus early in life and begin to seek His guidance when we are young.

A pastor remembers a home of a young couple. It was a little bit of heaven, on earth. Long before their marriage they had sought God's guidance. Already as a boy the young man had prayed to God that he would guide him in finding his life's partner. God heard his prayer and blessed his home. So, too, He will bless the marriage estate of all who seek His help.

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,¹⁵

O happy home, where Thou art loved the dearest,
Thou loving Friend, and Saviour of our race;
And where among the guests there never cometh
One who can hold such high and honoured place.
O happy home, where two in heart united
In holy faith and blessed hope are one,
Where both to Thee their love have truly plighted,
And serve Thee till their earthly course is run.

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

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- ¹ Colossians 3:17
 - ² See also 2 Cor. 11:2
 - ³ Hymn 359 v 2
 - ⁴ See also John 4:34
 - ⁵ Genesis 2:18
 - ⁶ Verse 23
 - ⁷ See also Genesis 2:18
 - ⁸ Verse 33
 - ⁹ Verse 24
 - ¹⁰ Galatians 3:28
 - ¹¹ See also Eph. 6:5
 - ¹² Verse 25
 - ¹³ Verses 33, 28
 - ¹⁴ Hosea 11:4
 - ¹⁵ Hymn 587