

Christ and the Church Ephesians 5:-22-33

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is one of those texts in Scripture around which has arisen a bit of controversy. This usually happens when a passage of Scripture is grossly misapplied and misinterpreted. Some here today may have listened to this passage as it was read, noticed that it was the topic for today's sermon, and are already prepared to defend their position on what they think this text is addressing. I hope you listen to the entire sermon today, and listen to it completely, with an open heart and mind.

To be honest, this text is fairly simple and straightforward. It is often the case that wherever there are words in Scripture around which there is often controversy, those words are very clear and distinct. Great problems arise when people are unwilling to take that Word of God as God intended it, the ultimate authority in all doctrine, and the life of the Christian.

What is it that causes controversy? What would cause some to overturn the clear teaching of Scripture? First, there is personal opinion. People will base their unwillingness to accept the clear words of Scripture saying, "That is not what *I think* and not what *I believe*," whether what they think or believe agrees with God's Word or not.

And as if often the case, too often, what *the world or culture think and believe* often do not agree with Scripture.

Of course, the greatest problems develop when the world, the culture, and personal beliefs are in harmony. When these three are in agreement, even if it disagrees with the clear teaching of Scripture, all too often, it is at this point that God's Word is thrown out and discarded. Or, at the very least, this is where the search begins for any teaching somewhere that will explain away the disharmony between personal belief and the clear teaching of Scripture.

This passage in Ephesians has long been an item of contention. First, it mentions that wives are to submit to their husbands. To most women, dems fightin' words, "I don't submit to any man." Still others will shoot down God's Word by saying, "My husband and I are equal partners."

Already, there is a problem. Are the words of the text clear? The answer is, "Yes." Wives are to submit to their own husbands! But it does not stop there. Wives are to submit to their own husbands - *as to the Lord - as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.* Many hear the "submit to their husbands" part and tune out the rest, they do not hear the part about submission to the Lord, submission to Jesus Christ. To be perfectly honest, there is the greater problem, we are defiant to God. We are unwilling to submit to His will and Word. None of us willfully submits to the Lord in all things – neither male nor female – do we?

Did you notice the wording, wives are to submit. Nowhere in the text does it say that men are to rule over their wives. Submission is an act of giving away authority, "I give up my own authority

– and submit, or, place myself under the authority of another.”

So, how is that going wives? Let’s face it, all the jokes that abound about who wears the pants in the family do have some modicum of truth behind them. I remember a beloved line that a friend of mine used to joke, “The rooster may rule the roost, but you know who rules the rooster?”

But, before we go too far, let us look at what it says to husbands. *Husbands are to love their wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.* Husbands are to love their wives more than they love themselves, even to the point of dying for them. They should be willing to give up their own life for their wives.

How is that going husbands? Again, the jokes could abound here as well. The only things husbands love is their recreation. They work hard to play hard - and heaven forbid they are bothered by their wives or their children. You know the line, “the only difference between men and boys is the price of their toys.” Let’s face it, men are usually self-indulgent, they love the toys for themselves - they love to make themselves happy.

Neither husbands nor wives really follows the mandates given in this text for spouses. Two sins often define a couple’s marital relationship - defiance and unlovingness – or maybe we should just call them what they both are, selfishness.

Now, I want you to listen carefully to what I am about to say. Men and women were not created equal. I say that to arrest your attention that you might listen to the point. We are not equal nor alike in many ways, and those differences are pretty obvious. Men and women are not alike physically - that is pretty obvious. Men and women are not alike emotionally, nor do they process things mentally in the same way. And, I think those truths are also very self evident.

If we are completely honest with ourselves, we can see very clearly that we are not equal, and I must proclaim very emphatically, thank goodness for that. Not being equal does not mean that one is better than the other. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. I am glad Pauline and I are not the same.

God didn’t create us equal, but complimentary. God created Eve to be Adam’s helpmate, for he was incomplete without her. We are complimentary to one another. Looking at those differences and the directive in our text, we can say that in a marriage, the man is the head and the woman is the heart. Men, do you think you could complete a day’s work if you were to remove your heart from your body? Women, how long would you survive if you cut off your head? God made man and woman to be complimentary - complete when the two become one flesh. Each of us has shortcomings, and the weaknesses of each are only strengthened as a part of that whole, that oneness of marriage.

But before we go too far along these lines, there is something else we should consider. Yes. This text talks about marriage. It speaks clearly about the role of the wife and the role of the husband, but guess what, that is only the secondary purpose for this text. Did you hear that? The relationship of wife to husband and husband to wife is only the **SECONDARY PURPOSE** of this text.

Listen to two sentences of this text again. *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

Some of you were starting to tune out this sermon because you are not married, nor will you be any time in the future, so you were thinking this doesn't apply to you.

But did you all catch what the text said? The main purpose of this text is to reference Christ and the church. The Church is Christ's bride. How faithful are we? Does Christ's bride willingly submit to her husband? Or, does the church seek to set its own rules, and make itself its own authority? Does it willingly submit to the authority of God? And, not only the church as a whole, but each of us as individual members of that church? Does God's will rule in our lives in all things, do we submit willingly to God's authority? Or, do we go our own way when our will is contrary to God's Word? Too often, we do what we want based upon what we *want* to believe - thereby committing spiritual adultery against God?

This text talks about husbands loving their wives as their own body, but it is more than a prescription for husbands, it is a reference to Christ's relationship to His bride the Church. We are Christ's own body, with Christ as the head.

Consider this - would your foot, at the end of a long day, when told by the head to go to sleep, get up in the middle of the night and sneak off to make a bologna sandwich? No! Would the eye, when told to look at a book and read the pages there, instead run off from the rest of the body and go ice fishing? Of course not.

So, why do we, the individual members of the body of Christ, who is our head, run around doing those things we have not been instructed to do? And even greater still, why do we go off doing those things that our Head has expressly forbidden us to do? And, why do we not do those things that our Head has graciously asked us to do?

Good questions. It is because of our selfishness. Repent!

It is also why our Lord Jesus Christ took on human flesh. *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*

At Christian weddings, the bride wears a white dress. The reason for this practice is not as many seem to think. In a Christian wedding, it is not the bride's day. At a Christian wedding, it is not all about the two people standing before the congregation. Instead, the bride and groom stand before the congregation at a Christian wedding as symbols of the relationship of Christ to His bride, the Church.

The bride is wearing white because she represents the church. She is the earthly vision of a picture painted in Revelation of those robed in white. Her white garment is a symbol of the wedding

garment provided by Christ to His church. The bride is wearing white to show that Christ's church is holy - without sin - sanctified - cleansed of sin by water with the word. *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* - giving His life unto death upon the cross to redeem her from her defiance and unwillingness to love unconditionally - *that he might sanctify her* – make her holy. Dressed in white, the bride represents the church as it is presented by Christ, to Himself, in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

We could talk about Jesus giving us an example, modeling for us the proper relationship of husband to wife - willing to and even dying for His bride. Jesus also models the proper manner of submission in His own perfect submission to the will of the Father - submitting even to the point of death, death on the cross. But Christ is so much more than example or teacher to husbands and wives.

We are given this text, not only to encourage those in their marital relationships, but to proclaim to us the Gospel. Christ has done all that is necessary to purify us and make us holy. You have been cleansed, washed clean in the waters of baptism and robed in Christ's righteousness.

As the Father looks at us, He sees us not as we are according to our sinful flesh, but as we are united to Christ, we are "one flesh" with Him. Our sins of defiance and unlovingness – our selfishness is nailed to the cross, and we are covered in Christ's white robe of righteousness. The Father sees us through Christ, and through the cross, so that we are seen as the forgiven, the redeemed and holy bride.

You are the beloved of God in Christ Jesus, you are His church, His beloved bride. Our text proclaims that *no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church*. Today we have gathered to enjoy the wedding feast of the Lamb. We are here to partake of that which nourishes us in our relationship with Christ - His own body and blood. And in the eating and drinking, we are submitting to Christ, for He has so invited us to do so to eat and drink. We are blessed in that submission - blessed with forgiveness and the strengthening of our faith that we might submit to, and love one another. Amen.