

Respecting God's Design

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

As the Apostle Paul related the obligations and/or privileges of domestic duties, he does so, not so much that mankind can understand what his or her obligations are, but, as he explains, “I speak in regard of Christ and of the church” (Ephesians 5:32).

The scriptures identify obligations that are not well received in the natural society, i.e., “Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:22-24): it is nonetheless God-designed, as the scriptures affirm, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31). Just as God's design for marriage is often frowned upon, so also is God's design for the church.

Understanding one relationship helps with an understanding of another, as the Apostle stated, “I speak in regard to Christ and of the church.” Although the former relationship between the husband and the wife is that to which Paul testified, it is Christ's relationship with the church we want to consider for a moment.

The term church was used among the Greeks of a body of citizens "gathered" to discuss the affairs of state, Acts 19:39. In the Sept. it is used to designate the "gathering" of Israel, summoned for any definite purpose, or a "gathering" regarded as representative of the whole nation. In Acts 7:38 it is used of Israel; in 19:32, 41, of a riotous mob. It has two applications to companies of Christians, (a) to the whole company of the redeemed throughout the present era, the company of which Christ said, "I will build My Church," Matt. 16:18, and which is further described as "the Church which is His Body," Eph. 1:22; 5:23, (b) in the singular number, Matt. 18:17, to a company consisting of professed believers' (Vine's).

When seen in its true light, locally or universally, the Lord's view of the church should take preëminence over man's concepts and design. Talk to people in

the world and ask them, 'What is the purpose of the church?' What will you hear?

If my own experience is the norm, and I'll leave that to your own investigation, here's what I've heard:

(1) "The church is to provide for the physical necessities of the needy in the community: that's what it is there for."

(2) Another said, "I want to find a church that will provide wholesome entertainment for my children."

(3) And yet, many see the church as a political reformer. Hundreds of years of history prove that a number of conquering "Christian nations" believed they had a mission to bring the heathen, and their government under a banner of the cross. Even today some confuse bringing democracy to a nation with bringing Christianity to a nation. Of these three positions, two label the church as a benevolent and/or social organization.

Neighbor, Jesus did not die to feed the poor, nor did Jesus die to satisfy man's social needs. Jesus "came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). To reduce the church and its work to an organization that caters to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the vainglory of life, motivated by the imaginations and emotions of man, is best described as a blight.

The Hebrew writer affirmed that "inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment; so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation" (Hebrews 9:27-28). Preparation for that end requires that we respect God's design in the fulfillment thereof. ret