

"The Christian Life: Submission and Sacrifice"

(Ephesians 5:22-33)

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. What a great blessing it is to have this quality time in the season of Pentecost in which we are liturgically led – as the Church Year keeps us in the full-counsel of God – to carefully study the Christian life that is produced by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit working in you through Word and Sacrament!

The Word of God especially from the epistles is so practical in orientation. For example, part of last Sunday's epistle included Ephesians 5:18: *Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,*". This is an exciting admonition and command. First of all, it reminds us that we need to be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit. Though we received the Holy Spirit in fullness at holy baptism, we are nevertheless – in a relational sense to God – always straying from God on account of our sinful nature. Therefore, St. Paul admonishes us and commands us to be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit. We are to always be on the receiving end of the work of God, as God is the One who keeps us in Christ through Word and Sacrament. Being constantly filled we are also equipped to be the witnesses God calls us to be "making the best use of time (v 16)."

Now you've probably noticed that today we are on that text which addresses holy marriage, so why begin by reviewing our need to be filled with the Spirit and constantly receiving Word and Sacrament? Answer: because without God's work in us, and His Spirit and the Word of Christ enlightening us, moving us, directing us, then the words outlined about marriage will seem out-of-touch, out-of-date, and most likely offensive to our post-modern way of thinking. Simply put, without the Holy Spirit filling us and leading us, we will rebel – even as in the flesh we do rebel – against everything the LORD is here proclaiming about marriage. But with the Spirit of God, we will be blessed and our marriages will overflow with blessings; but against the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, marriage can quickly become a sad and lonely relationship.

Besides the inherent cause of controversy I've already mentioned, there is another reason why this pericope in God's Word is often avoided (point blank): not all of us are married. But here we have to correct this tendency. First of all, all of us are married. We are members of the Body of Christ, we are the Church...you are a member of the Church, and the Church is the bride of Christ. The Christian is someone who is married to Jesus. So yes, you are married. You are one with your LORD and He loves you more than anyone else loves you. This is a fact and we should rejoice to have such a bridegroom as Jesus! Secondly, even if we are not married in the civil realm here on earth, we all know people who are and they need encouragement and they need brothers and sisters in Christ who will help them take care of their marriages! This is true especially if you have family members who are married. How invaluable is the ministry of a grandparent who encourages the marriage of their child or children! That is to say, all of us need this Scripture and God gave it to His entire Church! So, so much for avoiding this text!

I used to be Roman Catholic and to this day I have brothers and sisters in Christ who are Roman Catholic, but having said that, I must confess to you that I am really, really glad that I became a Lutheran. Now the primary reason that I'm glad to be a Lutheran is because I am a

part of this phenomenal confession of the Word of Christ (I know of no other confession which so strongly proclaims the grace of God and the forgiveness of God in Christ)! However, there is another reason I love being Lutheran: as a pastor, I get to be married! My experience is that not only am I allowed to know the joy of marriage with my fantastic wife Traci who has now put up with me for 25 years! but in many respects Traci has made me a better pastor. Marriage is truly a gift from the Lord (even as we acknowledge Matthew 19:4-12 which clearly teaches that earthly marriage is not necessarily for everyone).

But let me go back to the idea that on the other hand, marriage is very much for the whole church regardless of our station in life, because of one basic reason: marriage demonstrates the kind of relationship God desires to have with us. And there are two little words from Ephesians 5 that explain this relationship: the words are “submit” and “sacrifice”. But before I speak further on these, allow me to comment on some basic relational considerations that help out along the way. I do this because for 21 years I have simply lost count of how many married couples I’ve served who benefitted from these basic relational boons.

There are many helps for marriage today, and certainly we should take stock of the quality practical resources that the Lord has provided. For example, I’d like to remind you of the fact that the needs of men and women (husbands and wives) are very different. Knowing this single fact and taking it seriously can make a humongous difference in marriage. It might sound juvenile or silly to say out loud, but it serves a good purpose: wives and husbands have different needs and desires!

According to Harley in his excellent book, *His Needs, Her Needs*, the man’s five most basic needs in marriage tend to be: 1. Sexual fulfillment; 2. Recreational companionship; 3. Attractive spouse; 4. Domestic support; 5. Admiration. The woman’s five most basic needs in marriage tend to be: 1. Affection; 2. Conversation; 3. Honesty and openness; 4. Financial support; and 5. Family Commitment.

The two lists don’t share a single basic need! In fact, from a certain standpoint the list for the men seems almost shallow. However, the point is not to judge and look down on basic needs, but to respond to them in Christian love and service. One of my favorite examples of this is the fact that my wife Traci could care less – for the most part – about spectator sports. She really does not enjoy watching athletic contests...it’s just not her cup of tea. However, despite her basic disinterest in sports, she goes out of her way to attend and watch some games with me. And when she does, she’s not just a bump on a log, but she will cheer for my team, get me some cool snacks, and totally get into what’s happening...and I know that all the while, she is doing it for me.

Gary Chapman wrote a little book that in my humble opinion is invaluable. It is called *The Five Love Languages*. It reminds us that we must communicate love to our spouses in different ways, because they often receive or perceive love in different ways. In other words, we must learn how our spouse desires to have love communicated to him or her (and everyone is different). The love languages are 1. Physical touch; 2. Quality time; 3. Acts of service; 4. Gift-giving; and 5. Words of affirmation and praise. A husband for example might believe that he proclaims his love to his wife by providing for her and engaging in hard work and acts of service. To him these may very well bespeak what true love is all about. But in some instances, surprise, surprise: the wife may view things as “necessities,” and not necessarily that which conveys love from the heart...she may still wonder if her husband still loves her. Why? Because

in some cases, the “love language” between husband and wife may be different. While he is working hard to show his love through acts of service, she is waiting for some quality time, for him to stop and look into her eyes and converse and to hold her. This is tricky for me, because I am not one to stray too much from the text, but we are talking marriage and as your pastor I am to care for the health of your marriage...trust me, these things do help. I’ve witnessed the benefit many, many times.

But back to the text and what is truly most important for marriage. The Lord leads up to the section on husbands and wives through the command to submit to one another out of reverence or obedience to Christ (Eph 5:21). This word means to “give way” to one another. It describes submission to others...and it is something Christians are always doing for other people to demonstrate the servant’s heart within that is in the image of Jesus. This is our starting point: Christ “gave way” for you...he put you first when He was obedient to the Father and lived and died for you. The word “give way” or “submit,” however, is used at verse 22 specifically for the wife. One of her ministry missions is to reinforce the fact that we need leaders in our midst. Marriage needs leadership, not a two-headed monster. This leadership has been given to the husband – and by the way the wording is very specific, she is to submit “as to the Lord” ... which is to say the Lord never abuses us or harms us, so when a husband starts to behave that way, then yes, the wife should not stand idly by – but when the husband is living “as to the Lord” then the ministry of the wife who submits to Him is a demonstration of the power of God. If, however, the wife resists this mission, then the marriage is on its way to failure.

This picture of the wife anticipates the leadership of the husband. It is one that is based on sacrificial love where the wife is motivated to stand by her husband who showers her with love. But how can a man have such consistency with all the ups and downs of life? Consider the fact that where St. Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives...” that the word is not “affection,” but the word is “long-suffering/sacrificial love.” That’s why St. Paul qualifies the words by saying, “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (v 25).” This is a vital qualification: the call to husbands is not to feel affection 24/7 or to be romantic 24/7 -- though we should very much pursue rekindling romance and affection -- but if you ever find yourself struggling then take heart: the Lord is here emphasizing your sacrificial commitment and not your emotion.

That means husbands that you are first of all responding to the Word of God, and the One who forgives your sins husbands is the One who calls you to your duty: provide, protect, care for, serve, give -- in every way that you can -- for your wife. Do these things whether or not you *feel* like doing them. This kind of love does not depend on how you feel, though so many foolishly want to assume that it does. Do it because Christ shed His blood for you. And do it also because of the stated reason in Ephesians: when you do, you love yourself! It is a startling, but true statement that when the husband is not really taking good care of himself, then it is because he is not really taking good care of his wife. A man who does not love his wife, who does not sacrifice for his wife, is detrimental to himself. How important is this? Well, in this text three verses are devoted to the wives, but *seven* are devoted to the husbands. The husbands must take the right kind of lead that is always in imitation of the Lover of our Souls, Jesus Christ!

And Christ did take the lead my dear Christians. He “gave way” to you and submitted Himself to the will of the Father to save you from your sins; and He also sacrificed Himself as

our Leader, and as a result we know these two little words as well: “submit” and “sacrifice”...these words mean that we are in Christ and that we belong to Him. May He continue to be the strand that keeps our marriages strong; may this living picture of Christ and His Church be the foundation for our relationship God and if you are married, for your relationship with your spouse...to the glory of Jesus Christ! Amen!