

“To Husbands and Wives” (Ephesians 5:1-2, 22-33)

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. In speaking of holy vocation Luther said, *“The household tasks of a single faithful servant are more pleasing to God than the contemptible worship and fasts of monks, since the servant’s tasks are performed in the Spirit and in faith. And the significance and value of works is in faith and in the Spirit, not in how great or many they are. So a serving girl, who sweeps the floor and milks the cows, worships God in a beautiful way....A student who listens to his teacher in faith should know that he is doing a precious thing.”* (Lectures on Genesis, chapter 45:24) But dear Christians, if Luther could say such vaulted things about a faithful servant or student doing their everyday vocation in faith, how much more can be said of the vocations that come together to serve as God’s institution representing to all the world the very relationship between Christ and His Bride, the Church?

In the Large Catechism we read about “how highly God honors and glorifies the married life, sanctioning and protecting it by his commandment. He sanctioned it...in the fourth commandment...but [also in the sixth commandment] he has secured it and protected it. Therefore he also wishes us to honor, maintain, and cherish it as a divine and blessed estate.” (Large Catechism, The Sixth Commandment, paragraph 206)

The Large Catechism goes on: “in the light of God’s Word, by which it is adorned and sanctified. It is not an estate to be placed on a level with the others; it precedes and surpasses them all, whether those of emperor, princes, bishops, or anyone else. Important as the spiritual and civil estates are, these must humble themselves [in comparison to marriage].” (ibid. paragraph 209)

These are amazing things which bring immense importance and value on the sacred and God-given vocations of husband and wife. We all need to

remember these things. For myself, I cannot begin to tell you the immense awe and excitement that I hold for the pastoral ministry: the Lord provides a vocation which – while serving in Christ’s Office -- proclaims the very Word of God for the forgiveness of sins and for the gift of eternal life, but as glorious as this vocation is, it is *not* my most precious vocation. It is *surpassed* by another one I have been blessed with in being married to Traci Dawn, my wife, of some [almost] 27 years. Being her husband is my first and foremost – and most sacred vocation – being her husband is my most important service to the Lord and in the Kingdom to my neighbor! This is why I’ve been inspired by what Luther once wrote about his dear wife Katie, because it reminds me of the truth about Traci: *“When I look at all the women in the world, I find none of whom I could boast as I boast with joyful conscience of my own. This one God himself gave to me, and I know that he and all the angels are pleased when I hold fast to her in love and fidelity.”*

And it is in God’s Word in Ephesians 5 that the grandeur and sanctity of marriage truly comes out as the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul describes the vocations of husband and wife. The context of course is crucial. Recall the fact that Ephesus (at the time) was a port city. The excesses of Greek culture permeated the city: false worship prevailed, idolatry was common place, and sexual immorality was rampant. Sounds like our situation today. So chapter 5 in Ephesians is not a random insertion about Christian sanctification, but it is God’s prescription for being protected from the world; for literally being guarded from the moral filth of sin that could otherwise take us over and swallow us up, so it is important to see the impetus – how God is moving towards protecting you and me. The foundation of our faith is indeed our protection: being in Christ in accord with our Baptism into Christ, but there is also a way in which our baptismal, born-again lives are lived out; there is a way in which we walk also produced by the grace of God for Christ Jesus is also our sanctification (1st Corinthians 1:30).

So the first step of God's teaching is presented in Ephesians 5:1-2: *"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ²And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."*

Again, the first step of our lives protected in Christ is to walk in love in accord with Christ who first loved us (1st John 4:19). It is important to grasp how the Lord identifies you Christian: "as beloved children." *Tekna* is the word in Greek describing children born of God. Now beloved children: live propelled by the love that God has given you and continues to give you in Christ! This is an intelligent love, a deliberate love, a purposeful love – not a love relying on shifting and changing emotions – but the love of commitment and what all Christians know through the love of Jesus towards them: sacrificial love. One traditional translation of this love in 1st Corinthians 13 is "long-suffering"...this love extends itself to others while crucifying one's sinful nature in order to do what is good; what is holy; in imitation of Christ who loved us the exact same way...giving Himself to the point of death on the cross. This love is to mark your life as this is the love you've received; this is the love Jesus poured out for you when He gave Himself up FOR YOU as a fragrant offering to the Father. His life for your life: the world has never known such wondrous love, and now it's yours, so...walk in it...live this way...imitate God this way. It is free, it is voluntary, and it is to experience what the Holy Spirit produces in us through Word and Sacrament.

But this love needs a vehicle...it needs a housing; a manifold to carry it and to express it...it needs holy vocation and indeed all vocations given to us are vehicles for living out such love, but none of them match the protective and glorious vocations of husband and wife. Love that must mark us all is given to the woman in the Lord in a very special way who voluntarily enters into marriage; who accepts the vocation of wife which is compared to the holy new creation of God: the very Bride of Jesus, the Church! The wife specializes in showing the world through her vocation what the world desperately, desperately needs to see: submission. Without submission, everything falls apart and enters into chaos. We all know submission...every man and woman in

this congregation tonight. Here are examples from God's Word (CTCR's *"The Creator's Tapestry: Scriptural Perspectives on Man-Woman Relationships in Marriage and the Church, 25-26)*:

- Jesus submits to his earthly parents while growing up (Luke 2:51)
- Christians submit to political authorities (Rom 13:1,5; 1 Pet 2:13)
- The church submits to Christ (Eph 5:24)
- Servants submit to masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18)
- Younger men submit to elders in the church (1 Pet 5:5)
- The church submits to its faithful leaders (1 Cor 16:16)

For the vocation of wife, this submission is not a strange thing. All Christians are called to submit "to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph 5:21). For heaven's sake, I practice submission to my children. They have needs and I need patience to serve those needs as their father who is called to provide for them and to protect them. When my flesh gets in the way, I must submit myself to Christ and in so doing I serve my children...I submit to their vital needs. But there is one vocation that specializes in this. And the world in its ignorance does not see nor understand the nobility of this vocation.

"Hers is a high and honorable calling, for when she subjects herself to her husband she reflects for others to see – in a way beyond our power to grasp fully (Eph 5:32) – how the church subjects herself to Christ." (ibid. 27)

In the book of Revelation it is the bride of Christ that is exalted in a way that astounds us and cannot be put into everyday words, so they are left for the apocalyptic genre of Revelation: she is "having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal." (Revelation 21:11) This is what wives represent. This is how glorious their vocation really is.

And our sin and the devil attack this vocation. Christian wives – every, single day of their lives – are attacked and assaulted by the flesh and the evil

one so that in sin they seek to rule their husbands while refusing loving self-subjection. But for this sin Christ shed His blood and in Him all wives who belong to Christ are forgiven and restored back to their noble estate from within and from without. Through Christ, their vocations are kept holy and once again they begin each new day to show the world what it means to submit out of love and with the intention to protect the world from entering into madness and self-centered destruction. As an example of this, through Traci's submissive and creative spirit, the house we live in has been transformed into a beautiful and reviving safe haven...this has come through her vocation from the Lord! Those who willfully submit, glorify God because they show that the Spirit of Christ is living and active in God's people!

Those who do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God within, easily criticize this vocation of wife without any real knowledge of how the Scriptures go on to describe the vocation of husband. If they did, they would realize that what the Word of God describes about husbands describes a vocation "that makes it a delight for the wife to subject herself to such a loving husband." (Lenski, *Interpretation of Ephesians*, 630)

In the vocation of husband we are called men to love our wives "as Christ loved the church" and how did He do that? By giving up His life. This is the epitome of sacrificial love. Wives submit, yes that is true, but husbands sacrifice: they give their lives away to their bride. This is a fascinating state of affairs because biblically speaking the husband is the head of the wife. When used metaphorically, this concept of "head" means leader of another. But pause now and consider how did Christ express his headship? How did Christ express His leadership? Never in domination; never harshly; never to exploit; and never to embitter (Col 3:19). Instead, "[w]hen a husband exercises his headship with *agape* love after the example of Christ, he will do so as one "gentle and lowly in heart" just like the Lord. And he will shower his wife with a sacrificial love which love is a constant proclamation of the love of Christ for the sins of the world. For such a leadership, the Church yearns for; the Church prays for, because this kind of leadership is nothing but a blessing. This is what the vocation of husband is to

convey. Thanks be to God for His gift of vocation and may we also honor these particular ones: that of husband and that of wife!