

August 22, 2021
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Ephesians 5:22-33

MARRIAGE, THE PICTURE OF CHRIST AND HIS BRIDE THE CHURCH

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

Our text for meditation today comes from the St Paul's epistle letter to the Ephesians, the 5th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

Today is our 7th of 8 weeks walking through St Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians. In the first 3 weeks we heard Paul illustrate the doctrine of the Holy Christian Church: what it means to be saved by *grace alone* through faith in *Christ alone* as an adopted heir of everything that Jesus won on your behalf on Calvary's cross. In week 4, St Paul pivoted to how your life as a Christian is shaped in accordance with this doctrine so that there is unity in the body of Christ as you, a believer, imitate Christ, walking as child of light, that is, walking in a manner appropriate to your calling as a redeemed child of God.

In our text today, St Paul illustrates how the Lord God intended marriage to be when He instituted it on the 6th day of Creation before man's Fall into sin. On that day:

"... God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."
(Genesis 1:31)

Well... everything was very good except for the fact that man was alone.

In the book of Genesis Moses records:

"¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'" (Genesis 2:18)

Using bone of Adam's bone and flesh of his flesh God literally *built* (cf: Genesis 2:22) the man a *helper*... a *counterpart* to do those things that the man was incapable of doing himself. Man and woman, each designed to fit and complement each other emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

In our text, St Paul quotes the book of Genesis saying:

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." (Ephesians 5:31)

While the Lord God created all species to reproduce, and some of them are monogamous, only male and female humans join to become one flesh. In the original language, what is translated here as "*hold fast*," literally means "*join or glue together*." (cf: TDNT, 822) Things that are perfectly glued together cannot be separated. When you attempt to break that union apart, both parts are torn and irreparably damaged. They'll never be the same. That's why when the Pharisees ask Jesus about divorce, He tells them:

“What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Matthew 19:6)

“... whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” (Matthew 19:9)

Marriage is not man’s creation but is God’s institution for good order in the world. (cf: 1 Corinthians 14:33) Regardless of how human courts might rule, the Lord God says that marriage is a lifelong union between one man and one woman:

“... for the mutual companionship, help, and support... in prosperity and adversity. [It] was... ordained so that man and woman may find delight in one another... [and] for the procreation of children who are to be brought up in the fear and instruction of the Lord.” (LSB 275)

The Lord God is the author and designer of marriage and no human has the authority to alter, modify, or reorder marriage into any other shape or form. But our culture demands that you bow down to the altar of the sex outside of marriage, open marriage, plural marriage, and the LGBTQ- XYZ alphabet soup and sexual arrangements. God’s Word proclaims that those who practice all sorts of immorality deserve eternal death and damnation; however, many Christians are deceived and indulge in them and give approval to those who do. (cf: Romans 1:32)

Due to sinfulness inherited from Adam, you and I draw near to God with our mouths, honoring Him with our lips, while our hearts are far from Him. (cf: Isaiah 29:13) You worship God in vain while giving in to the unholy trinity of the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh. But to live as if you are not a baptized Christian and chase after the desires of the flesh, denying God in word and deed, is an insult to the Holy Spirit in whom you are sealed, and you risk losing Him. (cf: Ephesians 4:30; FC SD II, 69) As we heard Paul say a few weeks ago:

“... that is not the way you learned Christ!” (Ephesians 4:20)

“⁸ ... at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.” (v. 8)

So when it comes to marriage, how do you do you walk as children of light? Paul writes:

“²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” “²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” (Ephesians 5:22, 25)

In a sinful world the word ***submit*** is a lightning rod for trouble. No one wants to submit but desires to lord over others. Even in St Paul’s day, when most marriages were arranged, it’s doubtful that his message of submission was received any better by the Ephesian Christians. But notice that the majority of our text focuses on the role of the husband and how they are to love their wives. Paul never says that the wife is to love her husband, only submit and respect her husband. But he says:

“²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church...” (Ephesians 5:25)

The word Paul uses for love here is ***agape*** love. It’s not romantic love or erotic love or the love you have for donuts and ice cream. ***Agape*** love is an active verb. It’s a love based on choice and a deliberate act of the will, laying down one’s life for the sake another. (ANLEX, 30) The marriage covenant is based on faithfulness not feelings. It’s being loving when the other person

is being unloving and unlovable. Parents know this love very well. There may be times that you don't like your child because of something that they did, but you still love them.

This love goes beyond feelings and circumstances. It remains and abides for better and for worse, richer or poorer, and in sickness and in health. It stays when you want to leave. It holds fast when you want to push away. And when you remain and love the other, even when they sin against you and push you away, you begin to catch a glimpse of God's *agape love* for you in Christ Jesus.

Earlier in his letter St Paul said:

"... be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us..." (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Too be sure, even the most wonderful husband in the world is still merely a sinful imitator of Christ. As an imitator, the husband is always going to fall far short of the standard set by Christ, not only in marriage but in every aspect of their lives. Likewise, the most wonderful wife is an imitator and will also fall short. Both must by daily contrition and repentance drown the old Adam and die to all sins and evil desires. Both must forgive one another just as God in Christ forgives them. The husband's imitation is imperfect but by holding fast to Christ, he reflects the love given him in Christ – and the wife is blessed to see the dim reflection of Christ in the man to whom she is married. (cf: 1 Corinthians 13:12)

Sin brought disorder and chaos into God's perfect creation and into every aspect of our humanity including our sexuality. Marriage reorders male and female back into God's intended order. When Paul says: ***"Wives, submit to your own husbands..."*** he's not being chauvinistic. It doesn't mean that she is in some way inferior to the man. It's not a power thing. The husband isn't the boss. It's God's created order, or headship. He's the head. He does not lord over his wife. She's not a slave. She's the body. The two work together, like a dance. He leads, she follows. Even though the old Eve wants to lead, it doesn't work that way. That's not God's design. Just as God the Son submits to the Father, the wife submits to the husband and follows his lead, trusting him, so that she can enjoy the dance. If they both lead, they'll step on toes and fall down. If no one leads, there is no dance. When the husband leads, his wife gets the glory. When the wife follows, her husband gets the glory. It's never about you, always about the other. That's *agape love*.

Yet, for the Christian, the ***two becoming one flesh***, glued together in God's holy estate of marriage, holds a deeper mystery than the union of man and woman. Paul says:

"³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." (Ephesians 5:32)

It's a picture of the love of God the Father who sent His only begotten Son to put on frail human flesh and live a perfect life in your stead and pay the wages of your sins of loving the things of the world and your sinful flesh. It's the love of God the Son who submitted to the will of the Father, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (cf: Isaiah 53:7; Philippians 2:8)

Christ is the Head, the Church is His Body.

“...[He] loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ 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.” (Ephesians 5:25–27)

Married or not, our epistle text is all about you. It tells of Christ Jesus, and how He has loved and continues to love you and His bride the Church from the cross, in the font, and through His Holy Supper. He loved you to death on a cross that He might cleanse you, forgive you, and join you to Himself and all believers. With faith firmly fixed on Jesus, you:

“... have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7)

In loving response to Him His sacrificial love, imitate Christ, walking as child of light, honoring His institution of marriage, wives and husbands, by living the Gospel toward one another as He calls you to do, married or not, by encouraging husbands and wives to live as our Lord desires, and by honoring marriage in what you say, think, and do. Amen.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.