

# But I Speak Concerning Christ and the Church

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*Ephesians*

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 5:21-33  
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We continue with our sermon series through the book of Ephesians. We have been concentrating much attention on Ephesians 5:21-33 with verse 21 being a transition verse, a bridge verse as it's sometimes called, into this whole matter of submission and headship. Let us begin our reading tonight as we have before with verse 22 and read to the end of the chapter.

People of God, this is the word of our God.

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Thus ends the reading of God's word tonight in Ephesians 5.

Let us pray for the Lord's illumination tonight.

*Our Father in heaven, we thank You that You have not left us as orphans to fend for ourselves, to try to reason up to You, to wonder as to what pleases You. We thank You that You have come down, condescended in giving us Your written word so that we might*

*know Your mind and know Your heart and to be instructed from You. Father, we are in great need of being instructed particularly in this matter of marriage. Lord, as You have taught us so beautifully in this chapter, that we have so much to learn about the church, ourselves, and we have so much to learn about our Husband, Christ Jesus. Lord, we pray that You would open our hearts and minds to this text tonight to see much of ourselves and to see much of our Husband. We pray all of this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ with dependence upon Your Spirit tonight. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Well, these past many weeks now, we have held our concentration on the roles and the duties of the wife and the husband within this divinely ordered relationship called marriage. We've spent a great deal of time exploring the indicatives of the husband and the wife, those things that are true about them as a matter of fact, and then also the imperatives given over to the husband and the wife, those duties, those commands that they are called to carry out within this divinely ordered relationship.

As we've explored the dynamics of each party in the relationship, we have seen throughout that central to any treatment of the wife and husband is done so only in light of two other parties, namely the church and the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason for this is not only found in Paul's treatment of the wife when he says to her, "submit to your husband, submit as the church is subject to Christ," he writes in verse 24, and it's also not only found in Paul's treatment of the husband where he says to the husband, "love as Christ has loved the church," but Paul explicitly comes out here in verse 32 to state, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." He's very explicit on this particular point. There is much to be said about marriage in these verses but Paul does not want us to go away not seeing how much there is to understand about Christ and the church, which this relationship is a type. Given that our primary concentration has been upon the biblical principles and instructions provided for the proper treatment of the husband/wife relationship, this evening our concentration is going to be on retracing our steps a bit, of much of, if not all of what we've said about the indicatives and imperatives of the wife and the husband, but we're going to look at that deliberately in terms of the Christ/church relationship tonight and give the whole of our attention to the church/Christ relationship as we take the particles, the pieces of all that has been said about the husband/wife relationship and see that coming to bear on this relationship of Christ and his church. We've covered a lot of room, a lot of turf over these past several weeks, and it is in our treatment of the husband and wife and all that there is to see about those two parties and their relationship. We certainly do not want to miss out on all of the gems that we're to see in this passage about our glorious husband, the Lord Jesus and his glorious bride, us, the church. So let us kind of take this broad brush treatment tonight and bring it to bear on the relationship of Christ and his church.

Well, let us first consider the wife as she mirrors the church. In fact as we've seen, Paul actually begins with the wife as he treats this subject of marriage, and one of the wife's indicatives is that she is not a head in the relationship. She serves as a mirror of the church and her primary calling, her primary duty is to carry out that imperative to respect

and submit herself to her husband. Let's glean for a moment about how this comes to bear on the relationship of the church.

First of all, we're the bride. We're the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now one could sit and contemplate just that very concept and mine out many rich implications of that fact that we are the bride of Christ. A bride is the one that's prized by the husband, that's honored by the husband. We use that little phrase "the apple of the eye" of the husband. That's us in relation to Christ.

She also is the one that's cared for by the husband. She doesn't assume this responsibility of care and provider for the Lord Jesus. No, she has this glorious privilege of being the recipient of his provision and his care. We're that privileged one. We have this most privileged estate and what's most glorious about this is that our husband in this particular case is perfect. Perfect in his care. Perfect in his provisions.

Another aspect is that we as the bride of Christ, we are the body and not the head. This means that we never are to assume ourselves as calling the shots, telling him what he is allowed to do and ought to do. No, we're not instructing him, he is the one instructing us. In fact, sin in our life is found when we assume to be in control and really domesticating Jesus so that we can, in some way, have him under our control. That's what our sinful heart is prone to do. No, he's the head and we're called to submit ourselves to him.

If you recall those closing words of verse 24 that I attempted to accent in our reading tonight, is that those two words "in everything." The wife, remember the bride as we talked about the wife is to submit to her husband in everything, there's kind of a comprehensive dimension to it. We, the church, are called to submit ourselves gladly to our husband, the Lord Jesus Christ, not just in some aspects of our life but in the totality of our life; in everything, in all ways and in every way we are to submit ourselves, maintaining this respect and submissive disposition to him without ever grumbling.

Also, only as we are attached to him do we live and receive the nourishment that we as his bride so desperately need. Earlier in this series, you may recall that I mentioned that in every marriage there are three parties, not two. There is the husband and the wife and Christ and I used this illustration that is somewhat crude and that is that the husband and wife could be seen as ticks. One thing that's true about a tick is that it does not receive and is not to receive and is not created to receive its nourishment from other ticks as though that was the host from which it is to receive its nourishment and its vitality. No, it's only insofar as those ticks are connected to and attached to another host, a third party, are they indeed nourished.

The following statement might be found a little strange at first but hear it in light of what I just said. You love your spouse more when you love your spouse less. You see, we actually as we love Christ all the more and find him as our primary love, the host from which we find our own nourishment, we're only then enabled to love the spouse as we ought and to love our neighbor as we ought, and the same is true as we as a church, so as we are connected to and latched onto by faith to our Lord Jesus, looking to him for our

nourishment and our strength, only then are we able to love others in the way that we ought.

Lastly, the church not only is doing what's most honoring to Christ when she submits to Christ, but do you know what also is true is that we're doing what's best for ourselves as a church when we are submitting ourselves to the Lord. Christ communicates to us through his word to which we're to submit, and locally through those in whom he has appointed to represent his care and his shepherding in the community of faith, mainly to shepherds. It's when we do not submit to his word on the one hand, that we're found to be walking in ungodliness and as we walk in the path of ungodliness, we're actually finding that we're walking on a path that's much detrimental to ourselves.

We're to submit to the Lord's word but also the same is true with respect to the shepherds of the church that the Lord has appointed for exercising his care in the lives of his people. There's actually a passage in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews that's often quoted in relation to the responsibility of elders for a flock and giving an account for their souls, but there's actually a comma and what's on the other side of that comma is a lot of times not included in the recitation of that verse and I want you to listen to it carefully. Hebrews 13 says, "Obey your leaders. Submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning for that would be of no advantage to you." Isn't that interesting. The author of Hebrews is saying that as you submit to the care of Christ, which is namely through the shepherds that he's appointed for your good, in not submitting humbly and willfully you're actually doing something that's detrimental to you. It is for your advantage and for your good to submit yourself to your elders as you submit yourself to Christ. It's actually to your advantage.

So we as the church of the Lord Jesus must see ourselves, again, in this husband/wife relationship with Christ. That's part of our submission to him and as we submit ourselves to him, it's actually to our advantage and to our good. We say that sometimes to our own children, do we not? How many times have we said to our own children, "Son, you know, even if you don't understand and even if you disagree with your momma, please know that submitting to her is always what's best for you, young man. Always." And that's true of us in our relationship with the Lord Jesus. You can never go wrong in submitting yourself to him. Never. It's always advantageous.

So we can learn much from verses 22 to 24 about us as a church and our responsibilities in our relationship corporately and individually to the Lord Jesus, our husband, but let us carry on in the next section, verses 25 and following concerning Christ who is our husband. Jesus is not commanded to be head of his bride anymore than any husband in a marital relationship is commanded to be a head to his bride, rather he already is by indicative that head and that is the same with our Lord Jesus. He is the head of the church. He doesn't strive after being the head. No, that is what he is and his position. As we've seen, the predominant focus in verses 25 and following is on the imperative which is that chief imperative of the husband to love his wife, and all of the other verses that trickle down from verse 25 are all further elucidating that one command to love one's

wife, what does that look like, what does that mean, and Paul goes to great lengths to show us what that means.

Well, by way of just introduction to this whole subject matter of considering Jesus as our husband, let us recall that one of the primary implications of being a head has to do with this one word, responsibility, and we've seen this accented again and again which should be fundamental to our thought process when it comes to a head, that the head owns responsibility ultimately for the state of the relationship. Our Lord Jesus, having been given a bride which is us, his church, the Lord Jesus took responsibility, full responsibility for the welfare of his bride.

Now I want us to kind of step back and see it, a larger redemptive dimension to this, because this speaks very profoundly to the subject of the sovereignty of God when it comes to the salvation of his people, the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Lord Jesus who took upon himself the full responsibility of winning, doing all that was necessary for the welfare of his bride. This marital relationship is one where he is the one that took upon himself us as a bride and he provides this continual care; having saved us, he provides us this continual care, providing for our growth, providing for our increase in this intimate relationship with him. Recall that Paul in keeping with this biblical pattern defines love not as a feeling or as an emotion but as an action; not one primarily of affection but one of action. His love is defined by his actions towards his bride.

We considered five ingredients of this love, if you recall. Those five ingredients were the aim of his love, the manner of his love, the scope of this love, the condition of this love, and the effect. I want us just very briefly to revisit each of those ingredients of this love where he says, "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the church," and I want us to consider more carefully what this says about Jesus' love for you, the church, his bride.

Well, first we saw that the aim of his love was always for the good of his bride. He loved the church and he gave himself for her, for her good, for her welfare. Brother and sister, you can always trust that the aim of your husband, the Lord Jesus Christ, is always for your good and not for your ill. It's always for your gain, not for your loss. It's always for your welfare and not for your misery. It's always for your building up and not for your tearing down. Everything that Jesus does in relation to you as his bride is always aimed at that, and that's so important to remember especially when we're going through difficult challenges in life, to be reminded that all of his dealings with his bride are always for her building up and not tearing down. This may be seen maybe in a clouded way through simple husbands such as myself and many of you, but remember this is a perfect husband. So even while you may find an earthly husband who in all of his attempts to seek the good and not the ill of his bride and fails miserably time and again at that, we have our Lord Jesus that in no way fails. His aim is always achieved. It's always done for the building up and the welfare of his bride.

Secondly, the second ingredient is and we considered its manner, the manner of this love. That manner, of course, was a love that was sacrificial. He sacrificially loved us as a

servant. He exercised his responsibility as a head and as a loving husband, always pursuing her good. It was always sacrificial. He took upon himself her pain. He took upon himself her ill. He took upon himself her shame. He took upon himself her sin, counting it as his own because the relationship was that tight and it was far from exercising tyrannical power or oppressive authority, far from exploiting her weakness. His commitment to loving us extended as far as death. Wow.

Third was the scope of his love. We found that scope to be comprehensive. When it says that the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for her, we need to consider who the "her" is. He gave himself for the welfare of the totality of his bride. This means that while we are in a penultimate way participate in the new creation in the fact that we within are regenerated, we have new life, we've been resurrected from within so that we now are in a true way participating in the new created order, but yet we're still waiting for that ultimate, that consummate end when you and I will appear before the presence of Christ where we will have sin altogether absent, pruned fully from sin, and we will be not just in spirit but in body, we will bodily be perfect before the presence of God because his redemption is comprehensive, touching to the wholeness of the human being, spirit and body alike. The scope of his love was comprehensive, loving her spiritually and bodily as a whole person. Her.

Fourthly is the condition of that love. We found that the only condition of his love for his bride is the condition found in himself. His love was in no way conditioned upon his bride. It was unconditional toward her. He never loved us because we were so lovely and so worthy and merited it in a certain way. No, he loves you, brother and sister, he loves you as his bride for this reason: because he loves you. That's the only reason you need. He loves you because he loves you. You see, that's what grace is. We need to return to the most basic definition of grace. What is grace? Pure grace? Pure grace, it is giving you his love and bestowing his love upon you because he chooses to bestow his love upon you and the only condition is found in his own reasoning, his own condition.

He loves you because he loves you. That's the weight we were talking about this morning. When you consider pure grace, has grace, just grace, that has a weightiness to it, it has a heaviness to it that should captivate our hearts. That's what we mean by the glory of the cross, you see. The glory of the cross, the weightiness, the heaviness of the cross. He did it all out of pure grace not because we earned it, not because we tried hard enough but watch this and this is where I think our hearts don't go far enough, it's not because we tried hard enough, it's also not because we cried hard enough, and it's not because we prayed fervently enough, it's not because we were sensitive enough to him. No, he gives it freely, not conditioned on anything that we bring to the table that wins him over so as to bestow it. No, he bestows it freely.

Isn't that liberating to know that God's grace is f-r-e-e? He bestows it freely. He has not, he is not, nor will he ever have a conditioned love toward you, conditioned on nothing in yourself. You know, that draws us into him, doesn't it? It causes us as a bride to want to submit to him willingly. It causes us as a bride when we think about the freeness of his

grace towards us, to have a happy respect towards our husband, to have a cheerful obedience towards our husband.

Fifthly we considered its effect. In the marital relationship we found that the good of both the husband and wife were actually wrapped in together. That's why he can say that as you pursue the good of your wife, you're actually pursuing your own good. As a man nourishes and cherishes his wife, he ultimately is pursuing not just her good but he's actually pursuing his own. His benefit is found in his active nourishing and cherishing his wife as his own body, but with Christ, who is the church? It's his body, is it not? Think about Saul when he was persecuting the church and Jesus confronts Saul. What does he say to him? He says, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" You see, Jesus' body is the church. He is communicating a oneness that he has with his bride such that when Saul was persecuting the church, he was persecuting Jesus because that is, after all, his body. Christ is so united to his bride that her body is his and any violation of her is a violation of him. Why? Because she is his body and Jesus never hates his body. He's never hated his body nor has he harmed his body. In fact, he's done all for the nourishing and the cherishing of his body which is the church.

Maybe we need to hear this. This is immensely devotional. Think upon this, brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus nourishes, cherishes you. The Scripture says, "For no one ever hated his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it," comma, "just as the Lord does the church," which is his body. He's saying explicitly in our text that's what Jesus does to his church.

Now this word "nourish" is "to nurture; to bring something to maturity; to nourish it." And he's always cherishing his body. This word "cherish" is a remarkable phrase, it's "to foster." It's actually associated with the word "warmness." To cherish. Do you know how it's used in 1 Thessalonians? Paul speaks of a nursing mother who tenderly cares for her own child. A nursing mother. Do you see that cherishing? Providing comfort, warmth, fostering the nourishment of that child and that's the way the Lord Jesus is to us, his bride. He nourishes and he cherishes his body, the church.

Well, brothers and sisters, indeed it is right to take chapter 5, verses 22 to 33, we've found many principles that are legitimately applied to marriage. It is legitimate for pastors and counselors to use these very words in Ephesians 5 for counseling marriage. They should be weighty. They should carry a lot of weight on the matter of marriage because herein the Lord gives us much insight into this institution but we should never forget that this institution is one that more than any other – now watch it – even more than the parent/child relationship and more than the master/servant relationship, marriage more than any other relationship you can name even that of shepherd to sheep, there is no other relationship in all of holy Scripture that the Lord uses to so closely parallel and so closely reflect that relationship that the Lord Jesus has with his bride. He's chosen to communicate to our hearts what it's like, what this relationship is that Jesus has to his church and he's chosen the institution of marriage to most closely more than any other relationship you can name, mirror that relationship. It's worth sitting and contemplating

these verses to learn more about our Lord Jesus and to learn more about us, the church, for after all, Paul writes, "But I speak concerning Christ and the church."

Let's pray.

*Our Father in heaven, we thank You that You have given us such insight into Your thinking when it comes to the matter of marriage and the marriage relationship and, Lord, we ask that You would bless the time and effort and attention that we've given over these many weeks to the marriage relationship. Lord, may it bear fruit in our marriages for those of us who are married and, Lord, we pray tonight that you would help us not walk away thinking that this text ultimately is about providing such principles for living, as important as it is, that ultimately this grants us a treasure-trove of insight into Your saving relationship with us through Jesus Christ. Lord, help us to cherish in our own hearts the grandness of pure grace that is ours in Christ Jesus, that One who is our Head and has loved us so perfectly with all of these ingredients. Lord, we pray that it also would inform us as to what our life should look like in relationship to our Husband, not only as an indicative but most especially as an imperative as we submit ourselves gladly and cheerfully to the will of our Husband, our perfect Husband, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray all these things in His name. Amen.*