

Written Copy: Ephesians 5:21-25 “Marriage by Christ’s Design”

13th Sunday @ Pentecost: Proper 16

Sunday, August 21st, 2021

Text: Ephesians 5:21-25

²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

Exegetical Statement (the text’s context)

Paul has been describing what the redeemed Church should look like, emphasizing it’s “oneness”, one body, one Spirit, one hope, one faith, one baptism, one God the Father, one Savior who is our Lord Jesus Christ. This oneness doesn’t mean all are the same, but each of us is a different part of the same Body of Christ. So how does this look as we live out our lives in this broken world? We place ourselves in submission to one another according to our vocational roles as given by God Himself. In the vocations of marriage this means that the wife places herself under submission to the husband just as the Church does to its Head Jesus Christ. The wife can do this when the husband loves His wife with the same self-sacrificing unconditional forgiving love that Christ has for the Church. When this happens the basic building block of society becomes an illustration of what is a mystery to the world, the relationship Christ has with His Church and the way the Church lives under Christ Jesus as its head. Just as we are to leave our father and mother and hold fast to our spouse, submitting to one another, we leave the sinful world behind in baptism and become one with Christ as His Body, submitting to Him in all things as He unconditionally loves us and sacrifices Himself for us.

Focus Statement:

God’s design for marriage is best seen in the way Christ has become one with His Church. He sacrificially loves and gave Himself to forgive our sins and make us worthy to be His bride. He continues to wash us clean in baptismal faith. His gift of the Spirit that brings us His forgiving love is the key to the husband loving his wife and the wife submitting to the loving care of her husband. In this way the two become one in Christ, just as Christ is one with His Body, the Church

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

We hear Paul say how wives should submit to their husband as the head and that husbands should sacrificially love their wives, and we judge this as unworkable and impossible. We see marriage played out in all its brokenness in the world. The true design of marriage is a mystery to those without Jesus.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Holding fast to Christ by faith and receiving His love through the Sacraments is the key to living out His design for marriage. Know that this relationship will not be perfect this side of eternity but is being redeemed and sanctified just as we are in baptismal faith.

Subject Sentence: Marriage: love like Christ, submit like the Church

Introduction: LCMS Charged with teaching Misogyny

As I was mulling over the appointed readings for this Sunday, I came across an article written by a fellow Pastor promoting our Epistle Reading from Ephesians as worthy of consideration for a sermon this Sunday. Following that I read a letter from a former LCMS member accusing our Synod and it's Pastors of teaching that "women were created by God to serve men. It characterized our views and teachings about the role of a man and women in the marriage as archaic, and misogynistic (or strongly prejudiced against women). And this person is not the only one. There are those in culture who seem to think that we hand out as part of our Catechism Program a book like this: (*show slide of "Barefoot in the Kitchen: A Pregnancy Survival Cookbook"*). Perhaps they would feel better if we instead preached and taught this: (*show slide of "A Woman's place is in the kitchen with her feet up, watching her husband cook dinner"*) In all truthfulness I don't find any Scriptural support for who cooks dinner, or cleans the house, or does any number of chores around the home. I don't believe that's my place, or the Church's place to speak on that.

So, do we teach that women were created to serve men? The answer is: "NO!" I do not believe, nor have I knowingly taught that God created women to serve men." If this is what was heard at a Bible Study or in an Adult Confirmation class, then I have seriously misspoken or have been misunderstood. Now that being said, this doesn't mean that our Church body has never intruded into areas of the marriage arrangement or spoken on a woman's role in society where Scripture does not speak on. There was a time when our culture regarded a women's place and vocation as confined to the home, and that women had no place in the workforce, or in government, or even voting. This cultural attitude was reflected in those congregations that did not allow women to vote at Congregational Meetings or serve on the Church Council. While Paul does, in another letter, discuss what is proper for lay women and men to do and not to do, the context is in worship, and should not automatically be applied to a woman's role in society outside of the worship service.

What Scripture Teaches About Marriage-in Context

In our Epistle Lesson today Paul, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, addresses how Christian husbands and wives should relate to one another. **Ephesians 5:22-23** ²² **Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.** ²³ **For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.** And he also addresses the men in **Ephesians 5:25** **Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.** This is a pretty clear statement of God's Design for the Christian Marriage. So, what's the problem? The problem comes when we look at marriages inside and outside the Church and see how this has been and is being abused. For this reason, some conclude that what Paul describes is unworkable. Some branches of the Lutheran Church either ignore these verses or consider them to be the words of man and not the Word of God. Some would say that we live a new reality. Here in the 21st

Century we have finally become enlightened, and these teachings, which are a holdover from the dark ages of Biblical times, are no longer God's intention or design. Since Jesus has come, who is all about love and equality among the sexes, He makes these verses no longer applicable. Other Lutheran denominations have argued that if the Church wants to continue to have a place in the world today it needs to change its views on men and women in marriage, or it will continue to shrink and die.

But before we dismiss any portion of Holy Scripture as irrelevant, perhaps we should take a look at these passages in the context of the letter where they are drawn from. In his letter to the Church in Ephesus Paul is addressing how members of the Church should see themselves, not like the unchurched culture around them, but as the new creation in Christ. In Ephesians Chapter 4 Paul encourages us to live according to this new reality to which we were called into, which is as members of the Body of Christ. He says that our life changed when we were baptized, and therefore we should change how we live it out as members of this Body. We are to treat our fellow members of the Body (**Ephesians 4:2-6**) ² **with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,** ³ **eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** ⁴ **There is one body and one Spirit---just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call---**⁵ **one Lord, one faith, one baptism,** ⁶ **one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.** With humble faith-filled hearts we are to live united in Christ and united to each other as the **ONE** Church, that is **ONE** body. through **ONE** baptism, that gives the **ONE** faith that trusts in the **ONE** Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul goes on to say that as those who are united in Christ are to worship together, sharing faith and fellowship by (**Ephesians 5:19-2**) ¹⁹ **addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,** ²⁰ **giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,** ²¹ **submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.** Note that this submitting to one another comes in the context of our lives in the Church. In living in this way, we give reverent witness to Christ to the world around us.

It is in this context that we read **Ephesians 5:22-23** ²² **Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.** ²³ **For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.** Paul is telling wives to submit to the authority of the husband as the spiritual head of the household, just as all the members of His body (the Church) submit to Christ who is the head of the Church. This passage is not applicable to women in the workforce, in the military, or women's right to vote. It says nothing about a woman's place being in the kitchen, or to be waiting for the man to come home to provide him with his pipe and slippers. It does not say that women were put here on this earth to be servants or slaves to men. In fact, the Greek word for slave does not appear anywhere in our text today.

Still there are many who have qualms about this verse. Perhaps some of you do as well. As I said before some Denominations try to ignore it or soften it. There are several reasons we have problems with what Paul is saying. First off, in many marriages, either the husband, or the wife, or both do not submit to the reign and rule of Jesus as Lord and Savior because they lack faith to believe in Him. If you're not submitting to Christ as Lord, you won't be submitting to one another as God designed the office of marriage to be lived out. And this causes the other reason, being that we have no perfect example in the world or in the Church as to how this design is supposed to work. Perhaps some of your parents manifested this Biblical teaching better than others. Perhaps you have in your marriage. But as a whole, mankind has lost the ability to live this out in the way God designed it a very long time ago. What we see all too often is this implemented in a dysfunctional way that neither honors God nor one another as His children.

Adam and Eve: Where the dysfunction originated

The only couple that was able to live out this design from God were Adam and Eve. They were both created in the perfect image of the Triune God, and they reflected that image in how they lived. They were two who had become one by God's design. God created them not to be identical creatures, but to have complimentary gifts so that when they came together in marriage they did so as the two becoming one who were perfectly suited to fulfill God's plan and purpose for them, procreate: fill the earth with offspring, and manage Creation as God's perfect stewards. While not much is said in Scripture about the specific gifts each one was given, we do know this: to Eve was given the ability to carry and give birth to children, with Adam doing his part. And to Adam was given the one law: Don't eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This means to Adam was given the role of being spiritual head of the household. And as long as each one lived according to God's simple design for marriage things worked perfectly. In fact, God described things as being "very good".

How long this "very good" state lasted we don't know. But we do know that as they strolled through the Garden one day they encountered a snake, who was the devil in disguise. He slyly suggested that their understanding about this one rule about the tree they could not eat from might not be correct, and that the consequence of death might not be correct either. The devil further told them that by barring them from eating of this tree God was holding out on them, preventing them from being just like He was. Now we said that Adam's role was to be the spiritual head of the household. The one that should've responded to the snake was Adam. He had heard the command of God firsthand. He should've simply stated what God had told him, then taken Eve by the hand, and left that snake to talk to himself. Instead, he failed at his vocational responsibility as spiritual head of the household because he said and did nothing. And because Adam did nothing Eve takes up his vocational responsibility and engages in a discussion with the snake about the plans and purposes of God regarding this tree and its fruit. And the rest is history.

Adam and Eve broke from God's design when Adam failed at being the loving spiritual head of the household who was to protect Eve and himself. And when Eve took over that role that belonged to Adam their failure was complete, and they both fell from grace. Instead of Adam loving and defending his wife he heaps the blame on her for what happened in **Genesis 3:12 "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."** And when that happened Eve, and all those wives who followed after her would no longer willingly submit to the man as head of the household. Instead, as God told them in **Genesis 3:16-17 ¹⁶ To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." ¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;"** Both were to blame, and both would suffer the consequences. When God told Eve that "your desire shall be for your husband, He wasn't just talking about the desire of intimacy but also her desire to be that head of the household in place of her husband. Yet the husband would rule over her. And from then on husband and wife would battle for that position as head of the household. As a result, God's purpose and design for marriage has been regarded as archaic, misogynistic, and unworkable. Today, for those without Christ, the concept of the wife submitting and the husband sacrificially loving remains a mystery that cannot be understood, because without faith in Christ it is impossible to attain.

Christ's Redemption Providing the Design and Power

But Christ has come to redeem the fallen creation and restore it to the original perfection of the Garden of Eden before the Fall. And in redeeming us he redeems God's original design for marriage. Paul explains this in **Ephesians 5:25-27 ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ 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.** How did Christ show the strength and depth of His love to us, His Church? By giving Himself up completely and unreservedly on the cross. He suffered and died for you and me, who constantly turn our backs on Him and love ourselves and other things more than Him. Even though He knew what faithless creatures we would be it did not stop Him from leaving His Heavenly Father to come to earth in the incarnation. He willingly lived among us; God's fallen sinful creation, because He loved us so much that He could not bear the thought of us being lost eternally. Out of a love that is beyond our understanding He suffered the sins of the whole world and earned salvation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life for all people of all times and places. He earned this for me, and for you.

He delivers this to you personally as His free gift, through the working of His Spirit in baptism. He gave us this Sacrament that involves the washing of water to help us picture and understand how the baptismal washing has the spiritual reality of washing away the sin from our souls. It is the Sacramental washing where the water is connected to and filled by the Spirit and the promise of His Word. As Paul describes, Christ works through this means supernaturally to make you one cleansed, without the spot or wrinkle or stain of sin. Even though you disobey daily He continues to cleanse you by the baptismal faith that is kept alive and grows stronger as He works through Word and Sacrament. He does this so that when the Father looks at you, He doesn't see your sin, but sees in you in the holiness and cleanliness that is Jesus' gift to you from the cross and the tomb. That's the kind of love that He has for you.

Living Out Christ's Design For Marriage

And that's the kind of love that husbands are supposed to have for their wives. The love that forgives the angry word and all her other faults. The love that asks forgiveness for the times when the husband fails to show unconditional love to his wife. And when the husband loves his wife in this matter it is a much easier thing for her to submit to him in his role as the head of the household. She willingly goes along with him because his decisions are not always in his best interest, but in hers, his precious and beloved bride. Rather than demanding she serve him with pipe and slippers, he serves her. And because he does all this she submits to his loving care. That's Christ's redeemed design for marriage in the Church.

Why don't we see this played out with such peace and perfection in our lives? Why instead is there marital discord and even divorce in the Church just like in the godless society around us? Because the Church is not filled with perfect people but with sinners. It's filled with husbands and wives who sin and fall short of Christ's glorious ideal for marriage. But Christ is not done with us yet. He's not done with you yet. He draws you here to show you your sin, to show you the ways you fail to unconditionally love one another and submit to one another according to God's design. He forgives you, and in doing so moves you to forgive one another. And when you are unconditionally loving one another, forgiving one another, and submitting to one another, you are His great witness to the Gospel Message of love, forgiveness, and restoration to the world around you. He is at work in you so that you have patience with one another, just as our Lord has patience with you and me.

Conclusion

There is no place in the Church for a message that says women were put on this earth to serve men. Eve was created from Adam to be his helpmate, the thing he was missing, the one who was to help him fulfill God's plan and purpose for mankind. Eve did not join with Adam to be his slave, but to be an equal part of God's plan and purpose for marriage as the building block of society. The two are joined together as ONE, just as each one of us has been joined together as the ONE body of Christ, His Church. We each have different talents and gifts that are not to be used to fight against one another, but to work with each other to glorify God. This is true in marriage, each partner is given different gifts, and each is to use their gift so that the two individuals that are husband and wife work together as one in God's kingdom. How you work that out on a daily basis is a matter of personal freedom according to the gifts God has given you. Deciding who cooks, who cleans, who takes out the trash, who fixes up and repairs the house, who keeps the budget; all these are something that each couple works out according to their gifts and abilities. But what Paul would have us take home from this is summarized in **Ephesians 5:33** **However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.** And if you are looking for an example of what this looks like, look no further than the love Christ has shown for His Church in His death and resurrection as poured out upon you in Baptism, and in the respect and submission we have for the Savior who gave His life for us and will give us eternal life to come. Amen.