

Mark's Marks of a Married Man

Ephesians 5: 22-33

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In the wonderful way our lectionary works, with Old and New Testament lessons and Gospel texts cycling every 3 years, we in the church have a broad exposure to God's whole council given us in Scripture. For seven weeks now our Epistles have been from Ephesians, where St. Paul has been expounding on the principles of Christian living. Today we arrive at this very significant topic, one that touches *almost* all of us, marriage!

Just that WORD brings up a wide range of thoughts, stories, jokes, joys, painful memories....the complete gamut of human emotions! Married couples have been struggling ever since Adam blamed Eve for biting the forbidden fruit.

How about Lyle Lovett's model of marriage:

-the preacher asked her and she said I do.

-the preacher asked me and she says, yes he does too

-and the preacher pronounced us 99 to life,

-son, she's no lady....she's your wife!

Gentlemen, you may be eating lunch alone if you even laughed when I said that!

There's another marriage model that I actually find hysterically funny. It's been going on in Finland for almost 20 years and it's called the *Wife Carrying World Championship*. In this race a husband has to carry his wife, who has to weigh enough to give blood in America (about 110), through a 300 yard course which includes two dry obstacles and, you can almost predict this, two water traps. There are penalties for "wife-dropping," but for the fastest couple who sticks it out, they get a trophy and the wife's weight in beer!

Some people may consider it barbaric or sexist, but I can find a significant theological lesson at work....or at play....in this: *she's not heavy, she's my wife!*

Ephesians 5 has taken a lot of heat because of verse 22: *wives, submit to your husbands as unto the Lord.*" It's a text that is included in Rite of Marriage in our Lutheran Agenda, and when I read it with a couple preparing for their wedding, it's almost guaranteed to bring out a strong reaction because of one word. You guessed it: submit.

The actual text for today begins with verse 22, but to get to the context, let's back up the train one verse: *submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*. This is the verse that introduces *everything* that Paul is going to say to men, to women, to teenagers, to children, to servants and yes....in his culture, even to slaves.

We ALL submit to Christ....because Christ is the head of the church, of which, Paul reminds us, HE is the Savior.

May the Holy Spirit bless us as we consider these very special words. It's not an easy topic, for a number of reasons as you can well imagine. For those of us who have been divorced, I among them, it's painful to think that the marriage vows that were taken before God and His people have been broken apart.....and then, so was the marriage.

Then, there are far too many people who are living inside a relationship where these words have been torn from their God-intended meaning, resulting in a relationship that's a long way from God's design for marriage. Far too often these "marriages" (used in quotes) result in massive and almost irreparable spiritual, emotional, physical and sexual abuse that affects not only the women, but the children as well.

Finally, our culture is hypersensitive to the "rights of each individual," which promises freedom and fulfillment, but can't deliver....because the only TRUE freedom and the only TRUE fulfillment comes from living *UNDER the cross of Jesus Christ!*

(Turn to Ephesians 5) Let's take this text apart for the next few minutes and see what God is saying to us through Paul. Here's the key phrase, (v 21) *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.* In the Greek text, THIS phrase is linked to verse 18b, which says ***Be filled with the Spirit.*** That's how we're all supposed to live....constantly FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT. It begins at our baptism and continues through out lives. Remember Luther's words, "*the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies us in the one true faith*"

WHEN we are filled with the Holy Spirit, (look at verse 19) **FOUR DIFFERENT things happen.....or SHOULD happen..... to us:**

First, we speak to one another in songs, hymns and spiritual songs, literally the language of love between God's people!

Second, we sing and make music in our hearts to God.

Third, we constantly thank God for everything, no matter what!

And **Fourth**, we submit to each other....out of reverence for Christ.

This is St. Paul's "**Checklist for Christian Living**" and it begins with one word: **SUBMISSION.**

Consider Christ.....and how HE submitted Himself to the Will of the Father and the Spirit. When we study the Creed we call it His "state of humiliation." Do YOU like to be humiliated? I don't think anyone does, and yet Christ was:

- conceived by the Holy Spirit -born of the virgin Mary
- suffered under Pontius Pilate - crucified, died and was buried.

THAT is truly submission....and Christ sacrificed Himself willingly for us all.

Following those same guidelines, we are called to live Christ-like lives, NOT to “earn us our salvation,” but to live as God’s called people, set aside, made righteous by Christ and modeling our own lives after Christ’s earthly life in response to the gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation He offered freely for us.

Before we challenge the topic of Christian marriage and how “submitting” fits into THAT, let’s focus on OURSELVES. When it comes to salvation, we have two options: we can try to earn it ourselves by keeping God’s Law perfectly OR, and this is HUGE...it’s the very basis of the Christian faith....we receive the gift of faith in Jesus Christ, submitting ourselves to be covered by HIS righteousness and not our own and literally let Him carry the cross FOR us!

That’s the model Paul....and God.....gives us for Christian marriage.

Let’s get specific: **Wives**, *submit yourselves to your husbands*. The literal translation for the word *submit* is to “give up your rights.” That’s what you do when you become married to your husband. You “give up your rights” NOT because your husband is your Lord but because Christ is the Lord of all of us. Paul continues: *for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, of which He is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*”

One aspect of this section of Paul’s letter bears a bit deeper look, and that is the word “*submit*.” (*hypotassomai*) Unfortunately there are some Christian churches and Christian men have given it a meaning of “OBEY.” That is far from correct. In fact, that usage doesn’t occur *ANYWHERE* in Scripture with regard to wives and their husbands. It does with children and their parents (Eph 6:1) and slaves to their masters (6:5) What it **DOES** mean is that Christian wives willingly give themselves over to their husbands NOT because their husband is their lord **BUT because Christ is their Lord!** And there is no way and at no time that our dear Lord Jesus Christ has ever abused anyone who believes and trusts in Him!

When we as Christians GIVE ourselves over to the Lordship of our Lord Jesus Christ, we know that He will guard us, guide us, protect us, defend us, give us His righteousness, prepare an eternal home for us, and....ultimately, that He died on the cross for us. In ANY relationship we have with Jesus, it’s Jesus who truly “does the heavy lifting,” so that we can give ourselves over to this relationship with a joyful acceptance. It creates a deep and wonderful peace within us. It’s on THAT basis that Paul gives us this doctrine.....so that Christian women will truly have a peace that passes earthly understanding.

Husbands, *LOVE your wives JUST AS CHRIST loved the church and gave himself for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by washing and water through the word and to present her to Himself as a radiant church without stain or blemish. In this same way husbands out to love their wives as their own bodies.*

Men...husbands and husbands to be, what is the very first word that Paul uses? LOVE! (agapete)! In the Greek there are several words for love: brotherly love, parental love, sexual/erotic love and the one Paul uses here.... Agape love. It's the same kind of love Jesus has for us...it's undeserved. It's without limits. It's without bounds. It has no beginning and has no end. It's pure. It's self-less. It's not critical. It's depth has no limits. And the "lover" will even die for the beloved, as Christ died for His bride, the church. And because Paul's language includes the two being "one flesh," the closest possible way in which two people can relate, this precludes.....I should even say FORBIDS....any kind of chauvinism or abuse.

AGAPE is the word Paul uses when he describes a husband's love for his wife, a love that enables him to put her above himself. Note too, that a husband should love his wife the way he does his own body....*"he nourishes it and cares for it."* (v 29) Husbands.... How is your wife nourished by you and by your marriage? Is she a healthier person for being married to you? Is she a better person?

Gentlemen, and young men who someday will desire to be married yourselves, it's a touch and challenging text! It offers us a chance to reflect on how well we are truly caring for, loving, nurturing and nourishing our wives. And while most of us can read a zone defense or a car repair manual (notice I didn't say the INSTRUCTIONS), we can't read our wives or understand them as well as we should. It doesn't come easily, it doesn't even come naturally....it takes WORK, but it...but she IS worth it.....just as we have been worth it for Jesus to love us and forgive us in our own lives.

The title for this sermon....and there was a title....is "Mark's Marks of a Married Man. So far we've only had Paul's words, so I'm going to end with a simple list of five common things we can do to speak the language of agape with the women God has placed into our lives:

1. we spend quality time together.
2. we share words of encouragement
3. we give gifts
4. we share physical touch
5. and we spend time together in prayer.

These are God's guidelines for every spouse. God asks us to accept and follow them because they describe how God created us to live and how God describes us as His "new creations" in Christ, who has called us to be His...forever.

Amen.