

This is a Great Mystery

A Study of Ephesians

Week 25 – Ephesians 5:28 - 5:33

Prayer – Lord Jesus, you are the head of the Church. So often, that brings up thoughts of being told what to do or being under control. But these verses are meant to bless us as your Bride; and they are meant to bless husbands and wives, as well as all who support those who are married. Help us view them in that light. Strengthen our resolve to speak about the blessings you intend through these verses so that more would be drawn to your love through our faithful witness. In your name we pray. Amen.

From Last Time

- Is “submit” in Romans 13:1-5 the same Greek word as “submit” in Ephesians 5:21-24?
 - Simply put, yes. So, if we take what we talked about with submission last week, this is a voluntary submission that recognizes an organized structure that was created by God.
 - “Yield” is a possible translation that stood out to me in Romans 13:1. For me, it has less baggage than “submit” does.
- When did “obey” become part of the marriage vow? When was it changed?
 - It was in the Book of Common Prayer of 1549 and the Prayer Book of 1662 (both of which were products of the Anglican church and both of which were influential in the formation of many other hymnals, including The Lutheran Hymnal.
 - The 1928 version of the Book of Common Prayer seems to have omitted “obey.”
 - In 1922, the Episcopal church voted to remove “obey” from the marriage vow.
 - Other churches seem to have followed suit in due time.
- We ended last time by seeing similarities between marriage (or a wedding day) and baptism. It should be clearly stated that marriage is not a sacrament.¹ I hope there was no confusion there. Let’s wrap up that section by rereading verses 25-27 and answering the remaining questions.

The husbands, love the wives, just as also Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her ²⁶ so that he would make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of the water in the Word, ²⁷ so that he would present her to himself as a glorious Church, not having a stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless.

1. Look at all the positive and divinely given attributes that Christ gives to us, his Church—holy; glorious; without stain or wrinkle or any such thing; holy (again); blameless. Which one of these adjectives hits home the most for you as you consider your relationship with Christ as part of his Bride, the Church?
2. With such a perfect description, the reality is that Christ’s Church, filled with sinners though it is, is a perfect Bride. The relationship is untainted. How can that be?
3. In verse 27, Jesus is both the receiver of his Bride and the one giving her away. He gets to present his Bride to himself. He’s the only one who can rightly do so since he has created his Bride and he has committed himself to love her endlessly and without condition.

¹ A sacrament has three criteria in Lutheranism: 1) it is a sacred act instituted by Jesus; 2) it miraculously connects words of forgiveness to an earthly element; 3) through it, God offers the spiritual blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation. By this definition, the only two valid sacraments are Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

What comments and questions do you have?

Verse 28 - οὕτως ὀφείλουσιν [καί] οἱ ἄνδρες ἀγαπᾶν τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναῖκας ὡς τὰ ἑαυτῶν σώματα. ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἑαυτὸν ἀγαπᾷ. ²⁹ οὐδείς γάρ ποτε τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σάρκα ἐμίσησεν ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφει καὶ θάλπει αὐτήν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ³⁰ ὅτι μέλη ἐσμὲν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ.

In this way, the husbands [also] ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. The one who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own body; rather he nourishes and cherishes it, just as also Christ (does) the Church, ³⁰ since we are members of his body.

4. Paul and the Holy Spirit will do this sort of thing at times—get extremely logical. What sense does it make for someone to hate their body, which is a gift from God? In the same way, wives are gifts to their husbands (and vice versa)—what sense does it make for a husband to mistreat such a gift? Still, we realize that this is the ideal and that sin mutilates the relationship between husband and wife.
5. Doesn't it sound strange—the one who loves his wife loves himself? Isn't that self-fulfilling? Is Paul supporting putting yourself first? How would you explain Paul's message at the end of verse 28?
6. Verse 29 gets more into the relationship of head and body.
 - a. The husband (head) nourishes and cherishes his wife (his body); what are some practical ways he does this?
 - i. What are some ways that Christ does the same for the Church?
 - b. What things are needed from the body (wife) for the head (husband) to function properly?
 - i. What advantage does Christ have in this regard as he lovingly meets the Church's needs?
7. In the EHV, there is a phrase at the end of verse 30 "...of his flesh and of his bones." The footnote says "a few witnesses to the text omit..." I personally don't see a good reason to include it; the manuscript evidence is not strong enough to include it and it seems to muddy the waters more so than clarify things. However, the evidence isn't all that strong to not include it, either. Most popular modern translations omit the phrase completely (EHV, KJV, and NKJV are exceptions).

Verse 31 - ἀντι τούτου καταλείπει ἄνθρωπος [τὸν] πατέρα καὶ [τὴν] μητέρα καὶ προσκολληθήσεται πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν.

On account of this, a man will leave [his] father and [his] mother and he will be faithfully devoted to his wife, and they, the two, will be one flesh.

Here is the thread that runs all the way from Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:24) into the New Testament Church (Matthew 19:5 and here).

8. Καταλείπει – “he will leave” – This indicates finality; many definitions will get more specific by supplying “to leave *behind*;” in other words, there’s no going back to what has been left. In what ways do we (or at least, should we) see this play out when a man and woman become married?
 - a. Notice that the Bible, even though it is filled with many unconventional family configurations, still holds up the nuclear family as the ideal—parents and children; one father and one mother.
9. Προσκολληθήσεται – “he will be faithfully devoted” – In other literature, this can mean “stick to.” I’ve heard and seen “joined” and “united” most often. The Greek dictionary offered “faithfully devoted to” and I can’t figure out why that isn’t used more often (too wordy, perhaps?). Regardless, what pictures could illustrate the commitment behind these words? *Hint: you might find an illustration in this verse!*
10. What warning/command does Jesus add in **Matthew 19:6** that has become a part of our marriage rite?
 - a. If anything, what is added to our understanding of marriage through these words?

Verse 32 - τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα ἐστίν· ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω εἰς Χριστὸν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν.

This is a great mystery; but I am talking about Christ and about the Church.

11. “This is a great mystery” – this is where the title of this study ultimately comes from. However, this is not the only place we have seen “mystery” come up. First, let’s remind ourselves of what “mystery” means in a biblical sense: “a secret that is too profound for human ingenuity.” In other words, it’s something that our minds cannot fully grasp, but God reveals to us. In what ways does that apply to Paul’s words here?
12. While the mystery is directly pertaining to Christ and Church (I’m not about to call an apostle a liar), in what ways could we also say that, to a much lesser degree, the marriage relationship is also a great mystery, especially when things are done the way God intends?

Verse 33 - πλὴν καὶ ὑμεῖς οἱ καθ' ἓνα, ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα οὕτως ἀγαπάτω ὡς ἑαυτόν, ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἵνα φοβῆται τὸν ἄνδρα.

In any case, let each one of you love in this manner his own wife as himself; and the wife ought to respect the husband.

13. Paul has begun and ended each chapter with summaries or overarching principles. It's really a review statement, much like you'll hear at the end of some of our sermons—We say what we're about to say; we say it; we tell you what we just said. Amen.—this is very much the formula of each chapter of Ephesians.
 - a. So, if the principle is “Be imitators of God,” this closing verse is a final restatement of that theme.

What comments and questions do you have?

My hope is to finish chapter 6 before Christmas. I think that's feasible. I'll probably hold off on hymnal things until 2022. If we have a small window of time, I will have a one- or two- week class on something else. I have a topic in mind, but I'll wait to share it until the timeline has a little more clarity.

We will be back in the cafeteria next week.

Closing Prayer – CW21 #763 Lord, When You Came as Welcome Guest v. 2, 3 (another new hymnal text)

**Now give your presence from above
That these, by vowing true,
May show their pledge is like the love
Between the Church and you.**

**Preserve the vow these two shall make,
This circle round their life,
This golden ring that none may break
Which makes them man and wife.**