



# Bible Study

October 19, 2016

Ephesians 5:25-33

Luke 9:44-50

Ephesians 5:25-33 (NKJV) -

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 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. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 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.

Luke 9:44-50 (NKJV) - The Lord said, "Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men." But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying. Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, and said to them, "Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great." Now John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us." But Jesus said to him, "Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side."

## Commentary -

In today's epistle reading and its surrounding context, St. Paul makes what were, at the time, startling statements about marriage. Certain portions of what the Apostle says strike us today, as modern people, as shocking, but by and large, these are not the statements that would have been striking in his day. Likewise, it is what he says in this passage that we might be tempted to take for granted that was revolutionary in St. Paul's time. And what St. Paul begins in his discussion of

marriage is not isolated to marriage alone, but shows us a principle that applies to all of human life.

At the time of St. Paul's writing, and for centuries before and after, marriages were arranged. Often, married couples would meet each other for the first time at their wedding. People had no choice in the matter of to whom they would be married. These marriages also happened very early in lifetime, in the very early teenage years. With regard to marriage law, both in terms of the Jewish law and Roman, the husband held all of the power in the relationship. He could give his wife a certificate of divorce and abandon her, and she had no legal rights in the matter. Women 'put away' by divorce had no real means of making a living, and so were generally reduced to begging or prostitution if their father's family was unable or unwilling to resume supporting them.

Thus, when St. Paul says in today's passage that wives ought respect their husbands, and in the surrounding context that wives should obey their husbands, what he is saying was, at the time, not controversial. While today, it may strike us as antiquated or even misogynistic, in the historical context of the time, what the Apostle was saying to women was merely that, as they were forced by law and by the culture of the time to obey their husband and treat him with respect, that they ought to do so willingly, and no begrudgingly, in much the same way that St. Paul told slaves to obey their masters, not condoning slavery, but rejecting rebellion.

On the other hand, St. Paul's statement that husbands ought to love their wives was, at the time, downright bizarre. It was a commonplace in Greek and Roman culture for married men to view their wives (in particular their first wives, the wives of their youth) as a sort of necessary evil for purposes of having children and carrying on the family line. Typically, they sought romantic love and sexual fulfillment elsewhere. In Jewish circles, it ought to be noted that throughout the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, it is a constant refrain that men should love and remain with the wife of their youth, and not put her off to chase after someone else. The fact that this piece of wisdom had to be reiterated over and over again shows that the opposite kind of behavior was all too common.

Over against this, St. Paul paints a picture of a man loving the wife of his youth so much that he gives himself to her completely, being willing even to die for her. A man who loves his wife so much that he treats her with the same love and concern that he treats his own body. This man chooses to love his wife this much, and this deeply, not because he went out and found the most beautiful woman in the world to whom he was most attracted and whom he thinks to be his "soul mate". He chooses to love his wife so deeply simply because she is his bride. Ultimately, this picture is an icon of Christ and His love for His Church, for each one of us.

Through this theological description, St. Paul explodes the traditional view of marriage in his day. As Christians, Holy Matrimony is not just a civil contract with the purpose of managing inheritance rights for our children. For us, marriage is choosing, again and again, day by day, to participate in the love of Christ for us, by loving our spouse with that same love. It is choosing again and again to sacrifice what we desire in favor of what they desire. It is being willing to, if necessary, give up our own lives in place of theirs.

Whether we are married or not, God's love is one. The love of Christ which we are called to communicate to our friends, our family members, and indeed, all those whom we encounter is not identical to the love we share with a spouse, which love has a particular and exclusive nature, but it is not altogether foreign, either. The love of God as revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ is always self-sacrificial. It is always good and always merciful. It is always not just willing, but eager to forgive and seek reconciliation. Experiencing God's love will transform us, and through us, the entire world around us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us no longer attempt to, on one hand, claim the name of Christ for ourselves as Christian, and on the other, attempt to live lives in this world as if He makes no difference. Let us begin to look at every part and every corner of our lives, bring them to Christ and see them transformed. Let us draw close to Him and experience His love, and in so doing, begin to share that love with all those around us, be they family, friends, co-workers, or even strangers who

need to experience Christ for themselves. The transformed life that Christ offers to us overflows with abundance far beyond the meager lives that we may have eked out for ourselves in the world. All that we have to do is be willing to leave those old lives, those old ways of seeing and doing, behind.

### **Questions to Ponder -**

- 1) In today's Gospel, Christ tells us that those among us who want to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven must become the least, and must become a servant even to little children. Do you actively seek opportunities to serve, to give, and to show hospitality and kindness to others? Or do you view these things as burdens? Do you look for more chances to serve Christ, or to avoid and minimize your responsibilities and commitments? When the things you view as obligations are complete, do you look for more ways to help others, or do you hoard your remaining time and energy and wealth for yourself?
- 2) As the Lord attempted to show St. John when questioned about the others, beyond His disciples, who were casting out demons and doing other works in the name of Jesus, all of us are servants of the same Master, whether we be obedient or not disobedient. It is not the job of one servant to judge the value of another, or to tell his fellow servant what he or she should or shouldn't be doing. That job belongs to the Master, to whom every servant has to give an account of his actions. Do you find yourself comparing yourself to other Christians, either favorably or unfavorably? Do you categorize others as being 'good Christians' or 'bad Christians', or even condemn some people as not being Christian at all based on them behaving or understanding things of the faith differently than you? Do you spend more time thinking and talking about your own behavior, so as to have a clean conscience before Christ, in preparation for the day of judgment, or thinking and talking about the behavior of others?
- 3) According to St. Paul in today's epistle, marriage is not just a contractual agreement between two people governing inheritance rights. Rather, the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is a great mystery, a manifestation in this world of eternal, heavenly truth, specifically the love of Christ for His Church. This is similarly true for all of the Sacraments. Baptism is not merely a family gathering to celebrate a new child being brought into the world, it is the initiation of the child into the Church, that child joining the family of God, and the beginning of his or her spiritual life. The Eucharist is not just food, but through it we receive Christ Himself into our bodies and hearts and souls. How do you treat the mysteries of the Church? Are they just ceremonies or rituals to you? Do you look at them the same way you look at secular rites of passage, like high school or college graduations or birthday parties? Do you approach these mysteries with the reverence and prayer that they deserve, given their true nature, or casually and flippantly?

**Questions or Comments?** [FrStephen@stgeorgecharleston.org](mailto:FrStephen@stgeorgecharleston.org)

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