

Christ Loved the Church!

A Meditative Outline of Ephesians 5:23-32

By Micah Hackett

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

I. VERSE 23 – A CHRIST WHO SUPERINTENDS

- A. He is One Who Sets A Pattern – “The husband is head, even as...”
 - 1. When Christ sets a pattern in Scripture, when is He *not* the SUPREME Pattern?
 - 2. He is the CHIEF Shepherd, Whom elders must follow. He is the CAPTAIN of faith, Whom we must consider.
 - 3. HE is worthy as the object of our attention.
- B. He is the Head – “Christ also is the Head of the Church.”
 - 1. Headship here is tied invariably with care and a sort of stewardship and saviourhood of a specific body.
 - 2. Headship invokes submission of another party, rather than “requires” it as in Lordship to a slave whose will and person is not his own.
 - 3. “Of the Church” – specifically this body, not Israel as a nation. The concept of husband to wife relations is not new (see Hosea), but the capacity of this relationship is newly birthed. (e.g. Israel was never able to claim membership of a mystical body which Yahweh had formed)
 - 4. “Is head.” – a simple, all-encompassing fact, thus permeating every aspect of the life of the submissive party.
- C. He is the Saviour of the Body
 - 1. A Fully-Committed Saviour (v. 25) – PAST – “He Yielded Himself Up.”
 - 2. A Sanctifying Saviour (v. 26) – PRESENT – “That He Might Sanctify Her...”
 - 3. A Triumphant Saviour (v. 27) – FUTURE – “Present to Himself...”

II. VERSE 25 – A CHRIST WHO SACRIFICES

Note: the first command to man concerning marital headship is this: “Love,” as if such was (and it is) the prominent mark in Christ’s relationship to His Bride. The cry of the Bride is “One there is above all others: O how He loves!” He is not told “Maker her submit,” because this love, when fully understood cannot be resisted.

- A. This is an Act in the PAST.
 - 1. Before we even had opportunity to love Him.
 - 2. Even though we had no love for Him, He set His love upon us from eternity in His Son (Eph. 1)
 - 3. And this eternality of purpose extends into the future, for I am a joint-heir with Christ of all His inheritance.
 - 4. My existence is inseparable tied to God Himself, from eternity to eternity. In the past, “Chosen in Him.” Now, “Your life is hid with Christ in God... Christ Who is your life.” Then, “We shall be like Him.” Precious thought!
- B. This is an Act of DIRECTION.
 - 1. He loved the Church specifically
 - 2. Though He died a Ransom for all, the entirety of His work can be claimed by any group or individual brought under the blood.
 - a. Israel: “Wounded for our transgressions.”
 - b. The Church: “Gave Himself for the Church.”
 - c. The Believer: “He gave Himself for Me.”
 - 3. Thus we conclude: the work of Christ is not divided into portions – some for you, some for me. Rather the entirety of His atonement is come into by every saved individual. Thus it can be as broad in application (“Ransom for all”) or as narrow in application (“He gave Himself for me”) as it can be. Why? Because it is a single, infinite, once-for-all work. Christ could not have done more than He did. Limited atonement is not only unnecessary to be read into this passage, but it falls in part in light of this passage’s truth.

For the unsaved, the atonement is for them. It is just not theirs as a possession. When it is our possession, we receive it in all its glory and effects. Its fruit cannot be measured. Since it is infinite, it can have infinite application.

C. This is an Act of SUBMISSION – “He delivered Himself up for her.”

1. Thayer: “To give into the hands (of another). 2). to give over into (one's) power or use.”
 - a. 1 Corinthians 13:3 – “Though I GIVE my body to be burned.” Here Paul would yield Himself up in the illustration for his point.
 - b. Acts 15:26 – “Men that have HAZARDED THEIR LIVES for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” These were men who yielded themselves for their Lord, whatever the cost. What a fitting analogy of this idea of “He delivered Himself up for her.”
 - c. The word is also used for Judas' betrayal. Betrayal is being given over by one you trusted.
2. Calvary Was The Highest Example of Selflessness
 - a. “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” (1 Peter 2:23)
 - b. “Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.” (Luke 9:22)
 - c. “Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 23:46)
3. It wasn't Judas or Pilate who crucified Christ. He was there, having yielded Himself up. He was surrendered to His God, even to take on His holy vengeance. He spared nothing of Himself. No part of Him was exempt from suffering (Psalm 22).

III. VERSE 26 – A CHRIST WHO SANCTIFIES

A. This is an Act in the PRESENT

1. The Ultimate Goal: Sanctification (Verb)
2. The Description of this Process: Cleansing (Participle)
3. The Substance of the Process (Nouns): Bath of water with the Word
 - a. Some see baptism here, but this is a collective Bride-based concept, not of dying with Christ, but of purification before the consummation of a relationship.
 - b. Esther 2:3-12 – each woman was brought before the king after her 12 months of preparation. (Note, the preparation was a short time in comparison to living out what she was prepared for. Surely we can take lessons from this.)
 - c. Ezekiel 16:8-14 – God took Israel, covered her nakedness, and “thou becamest MINE. Then I washed thee with water...”
 - d. Positionally, we are His; we are seated in the heavenlies with Him. But God's purposes extend to preparation centered around the *rhēma*, the spoken word – Scripture that is not only on a page, but in our ears and in our hearts. Let us not be fatalistic Christians: we have a marriage Supper to prepare for! Let us saturate ourselves with this book.

B. This Is an Act Which Follows the ATONEMENT

1. This cleansing is part of the same love that Christ showed in giving Himself for the Church. Such tenderness is seen in the Ezekiel passage.
2. This cleansing is consequent to the atonement. The position before God needed to be taken care of before the condition was, the standing before the state. But just because the standing is absolute, it does not make the state of less importance. Sanctification looks to a blessed goal: my standing and state having no discrepancies. Sanctification is the bringing together of what I am in Christ and what I am practically.

IV. VERSE 27 – A CHRIST WHO SUCCEEDS

A. The Great Presentation of the Bride

1. Imagine how much this means to Him

- a. He loved the Church
- b. He yielded Himself for her in death
- c. He sanctifies her ever so actively
- d. What joy to see such a work paid off!
 - i. “The anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.”
 - ii. “Who is this that is coming out of the wilderness leaning upon her beloved?”
From the perspective of the Beloved, I don't think there is any place He would rather His Bride be than in His own bosom. “My beloved spoke and said unto me ‘Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away.’”
- 2. Note Who does the presentation: it is His work from beginning to end, which gives it all its glory.
- 3. “To Himself.” To reiterate the point again: His Bride is His delight.” While our song will always be that we never deserved God's kindness, there will be a day when the beauty of the Bride will draw the Bridegroom, and His love will not only be in spite of us but because of us as His accomplishment.
- B. The Great Purity of the Bride
 - 1. Negatively – What we lack
 - a. No spot/blemish. Just as He offered Himself without spot unto God, so we are presented without spot unto Him. But there's more!
 - b. No wrinkle. Not only is the Bride not subject to sin (without spot), but she is not subject to corruption (without wrinkle). But there's more!
 - c. Or any such thing. Any possible factor that could lessen the quality of this Bride in any way is completely done away with.
 - 2. Positively – What We Have
 - a. Holiness. A sacred entity, totally set apart unto Him – like Him and fully compatible with Him.
 - b. Blamelessness. Now this is positional. Then it will be literal. It will not simply be that He overlooks our faults. No, we are so purified in that day that He will be able to fully enjoy EVERYTHING about us.

V. VERSES 28-30 – A CHRIST WHO SHELTERS AND SUPPLIES

- A. We are His Possession – “Their own wives”
 - 1. “Bought with a price.”
 - 2. “The Lord knows them that are His.”
 - 3. “Thou becamest mine.”
 - 4. “I am by Beloved's; my Beloved is mine.”
- B. We are His Means of Glorification – “He that loves his wife loves himself.”
 - 1. By application, when Christ loves us, that is a benefit to Himself. It glorifies Him.
 - 2. If His love for us is a means to glorify Himself, it logically follows that His love for us is just as great and intense as His desire to glorify Himself.
 - 3. God's glory is His greatest joy! Therefore, O the intensity of His love!
- C. We are His Very Body – “We are members of His body”
 - 1. We see this earlier in Ephesians: “The Church, which is His Body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all.”
 - 2. Because the focus here is plural, “members,” it speaks of our individual appreciation of Christ's love to His Bride.
 - 3. It is IMPOSSIBLE for a man to hate his own flesh. One cannot hate himself.
 - a. Even in self-pity, or even in some cases suicide, it is self-centeredness that motivates the depression.

- b. Even in generosity, we get joy out of sacrificing for others. Even in selflessness we cannot hate ourselves.
 - c. Everything we do, positive or negative, is based on an impulse we want to satisfy. Thus, every action we take will satisfy some part of us in some way. It is impossible to fully hate one's self.
- 4. Thus, Christ's love for us can never cease existing. We are His Body: He loves us as He loves Himself. His thoughts cannot but be tender and cannot but aim for our greatest good. The moment the love of Christ is separated from you is the moment God ceases to be God. "What can separate us from the love of Christ?" can confidently be answered as Paul answered it: "NOTHING!"
- D. The Intensity of His Care / Love for Us
 - 1. He Nourishes Us – *ektrephō*
 - a. Same word as in 6:4 – "fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but BRING THEM UP..."
 - b. The idea is nursing someone to full strength, whether physically or mentally
 - i. Physically: "nurturing" to health
 - ii. Psychologically: "raising" to full maturity
 - c. The idea of nourishing the Church is twofold:
 - i. He is aiming for the full formation and maturity of the one new man (cf. 4:13)
 - ii. He is presently strengthening us for the fulfilling of our purpose as His Bride
 - 2. He Cherishes Us – *thalpō*
 - a. The meaning: "to warm and keep warm; by extension, to cherish with tender love."
 - b. The usage: "But we have proved to be gentle with you, as a nursing mother TENDERLY CARES for her own children." (1 Thessalonians 2:7)
 - c. "Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, they may forget, yet I will not forget thee."

VI. VERSES 31-32 – CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

- A. "Man shall leave" – Christ is the central active party in this relationship
- B. "Leave father and mother" – He sets His focus on His Bride (though this cannot be applied to diverting attention from God the Father in any way)
- C. "Joined unto His wife" – He pursues her; the wife isn't seen moving.
- D. "To shall be one" – One with Christ by His own desire: precious!
- E. "Great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."
 - 1. "Great Mystery" – We hold the center stage of God's Master Plan of the Ages
 - 2. "Christ and the Church" – How precious that these two words can rightfully go together!