

Christ and the Church



a thirty-day devotion concerning the Holy
Estate of Marriage, particularly addressing
those whom God has placed into it

by Andrew Richard

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Introduction

Do you want your wife to listen to you as the Church to Christ? Then *you* keep providing for her as Christ for the Church. Even if it is necessary that you give your life for her, and be hacked to pieces ten thousand times, and endure and suffer anything at all, you shall not refuse it. And if you do suffer these things, you have not yet done anything such as Christ. For *you* do these things having already been joined together, but *he* for one who turned herself away from him and hated him...

“And he gave himself up for her,” it says, “in order that he might cleanse and sanctify her.” Ah, so she was unclean! So she had blemishes! So she was deformed! So she was worthless! Whatever sort of wife you take, you will not take such a bride as that one that Christ took: the Church; nor one as far away from you as the Church was from Christ. But for all that, he still did not loathe her nor hate her on account of her excessive deformity...

Let no one be believed who criticizes the husband to his wife. And neither let the husband heedlessly believe something against his wife. Nor let the wife get unreasonably worked up about his coming in and going out. Nor, under any circumstances, let the husband show himself deserving of some suspicion.

These words are taken from a sermon preached by Pastor John Chrysostom on Ephesians 5:22-33. The entire sermon is a marvelous treatment of marriage, a masterful weaving of Christ and the Church with husband and wife, both theologically sound and practically useful, a call to repentance and faith, and guidance for living in that high calling. One would imagine upon hearing his sermon that he had preached it yesterday. One would simply assume that he had years of experience living as a husband with his wife. Certainly, based on the sermon itself, we would have little reason to suspect otherwise.

And so it might come as a surprise to learn that John Chrysostom preached this sermon on marriage as a fifty-year-old, celibate bachelor. It might come as a further surprise to learn that he preached it around the year 390AD. How could a pastor removed from

us by over 1,600 years, without a moment of experience living in the married estate, preach so well on the subject of marriage? For two simple reasons: he knew the Scriptures extraordinarily well, and he lived in the reality of marriage as a member of Christ's bride, the Church.

The Scriptures chronicle the story of marriage, from its institution in the midst of paradise to the wedding supper of the Lamb at the consummation of the age. "Knowing" marriage isn't a matter of living as a husband or a wife for a prolonged period of time. Knowing marriage is about knowing Christ by being a member of his bride: the reality of marriage is in Christ and the Church. There have been some truly heinous books on marriage published by people who have many years of experience being married. And there have been some truly great books, sermons, treatises, pamphlets, poems, and hymns written by those who had little or no experience being married.

This little book is not the result of experience. At the time of its writing I can claim but five years living in Holy Matrimony with my dear wife. But what is lacking in experience is filled up from the Church's treasures on the topic of marriage: the Lord's institution of Holy Matrimony in the beginning and his blessing upon it, Adam's joyous poem when he receives Eve, Moses' record of that blessed union in paradise; the love psalm of the Sons of Korah; Solomon's Song of Songs; the gut-wrenching prophecy of wedded bliss and adultery spoken through the prophet Ezekiel, the picture of the Lord's marriage to his people enacted through the prophet Hosea; all leading to the advent of the true Husband, Jesus Christ. Our Bridegroom began to manifest his glory at the wedding in Cana, and spoke concerning marriage, as recorded in the Gospel. At his glorious death and resurrection he betrothed the Church to himself in faithfulness, and not even death us did part. We have the comments of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to the Apostle John.

Expounding these sacred Scriptures, we have the writings of the early Church Fathers concerning marriage, such as those of Tertullian and Cyprian. We have the treatises and sermons of Augustine and John Chrysostom. Even from the medieval Church, when monastic celibacy was given higher honor than marriage, we have commentaries on the Song of Songs, like that of Bernard of Clairvaux, which recognize the reality of marriage in Christ and the Church. From the time of the Reformation, when marriage was extolled as having the institution and blessing of God (which monasticism could not claim), we have a wealth of marriage commentary. This high praise of marriage comes

particularly from Martin Luther, though also from many others. From the next generation we have the excellent marriage hymns of Philip Nicolai and Paul Gerhardt, Edmund Spenser's *Epithalamion* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. And on through to our day we find sermons, articles, commentaries, and catechetical instruction from saints made wise by the Word of the Church's Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. The voices of all of these can be heard in the following pages – in the bulk of the work passing through my voice, in Appendix C many of them in their own voices.

What follows is devotional in nature: presenting the commands and promises of God, calling to repentance and faith, following the pattern of the Word of God and prayer, and offering practical suggestions according to what the Scriptures say about Christ and the Church in their union. Each day includes a writing on a particular aspect of marriage, a talking point, a prayer, and an activity. This booklet is written for husbands and wives, but could easily be adapted to serve as a resource for premarital instruction.

Dear reader, there is not an original thought in the pages that follow. But on account of that, it is my hope that instead of hearing the voice of one man, limited in experience and confined to the twenty-first century, you will hear the voice of the Church catholic, from all times and places, as she has lived in the reality of marriage with her heavenly Bridegroom; and that hearing her voice praising her Husband, you would recognize the great love with which he has loved you, giving himself up for you that he might sanctify you and present you to himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that you might be holy and without blemish, betrothed to him forever.

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Day 1

The History of Marriage: Creation and Institution

Read Genesis 2:18-25



In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. On day one God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. On day two God made the expanse called sky. On day three God gathered waters together into seas and made dry land appear. And on day three God started calling things “good.” The Earth and the Seas are good, the vegetation that the earth sprouts is good. On day four God made the sun, moon, and stars and called them good. Day five, flying things and sea-dwelling creatures: also good. Day six, land-dwelling animals: once again, good. Now on day six God also made man, and we get a detailed account of how this went in Genesis 2:5-25. “The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” God put man in the garden to work

it and keep it: the Garden with good land and good water and good vegetation and good sun and good moon and good birds and good fish and good animals.

But at this point the Lord says something quite unexpected: "It is not good that the man should be alone." Not good? Why would God let these unpleasant words interrupt an otherwise pleasant account of creation? Why not say, "And the LORD God formed man and made woman, and saw that it was good"? Why say "not good"? For your sake. The Lord stops halfway through the creation of man, when man is formed and woman is not, in order to show you his reasons for making woman and the great benefits of marriage.

So, "It is not good that the man should be alone." And what is the Lord's solution? "I will make him a helper fit for him." Now various English translations of the Bible have wrestled with how best to translate this verse: "meet for him," "suitable for him," "as his partner," "just right for him." The English Standard Version says "fit for him," but has a little footnote "or corresponding to," and this about captures it. The Hebrew word used here is often used to refer to two people standing opposite each other and facing each other, very much like the two of you stood during your wedding ceremony. You were opposite each other, though not in the sense of being completely different. You were facing each other, though not in the sense of seeing a mirror image. But you correspond to each other, you complement each other.

Perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in the way the bodies of man and woman complement each other. You're both humans, made of human flesh, and at many points look very similar. Yet there are certain parts of your flesh that are distinct, and that distinction doesn't lead to incompatibility. Quite the opposite! The fact that your bodies are distinct is what makes you compatible. The Lord himself illustrates the similarity and difference by how he makes a helper for Adam. "So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man." The Lord God formed the man of dust; he made (literally "built") the woman from the rib. Yet in the end they're made of the same flesh, as Adam sings in his love ballad: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

And notice what he calls her! Adam is Man (*ish* in Hebrew); his wife is Woman (*ishah*). Similar names, and yet distinct from one another. They aren't the same, they aren't the opposite; they're

complementary. And see just how complementary! “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Man is so complementary to woman that when God brings the woman to the man there’s only one flesh. Adam has his rib back, not as a mere bone, but as his wife. And so you, husband, have received your rib from God. And you, wife, have been brought to the rest of your body. The Lord put you together like a key into a lock, like a missing piece into a puzzle.

And now we get to day seven, the day the Lord rests and looks at the good earth and the good seas and the good plants and the good sun and the good moon and the good birds and the good fish and the good animals and Man and Woman. “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”



Talk: List some ways that male and female in general complement each other. List some deficiencies unique to your own sex. List some excellent characteristics unique to the opposite sex. List some specific ways that you personally as husband and wife complement one another. List some ways that: 1) the bodies of man and woman are similar, and 2) the personalities of man and woman are similar. List some ways that the bodies and personalities of man and woman are distinct. How do your *similarities* of body and personality help unite you? How do your *differences* of body and personality help unite you? List some specific ways that you complement one another.

Pray: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23). Blessed are you, Maker of heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them. In addition to the many gifts that You spoke into existence for our sake, You also formed the Man of dust from the ground (Gen. 2:7) and built the Woman from his rib (Gen. 2:22), uniting them as one flesh in the holy estate of marriage that You instituted. We give You thanks for this excellent gift, which far surpasses anything we could ask or think. But alas, we confess that we have not lived in holy matrimony in a way that could be called “very good” (Gen. 1:31). We have lived in conflict instead of complement (Gen. 2:18). We have not rejoiced in one another as good gifts from You (Is 62:5) but have often focused on the griefs and ignored the benefits. Forgive our sins for the sake of Christ. Grant us to live together peacefully in this holy calling. Let us never be

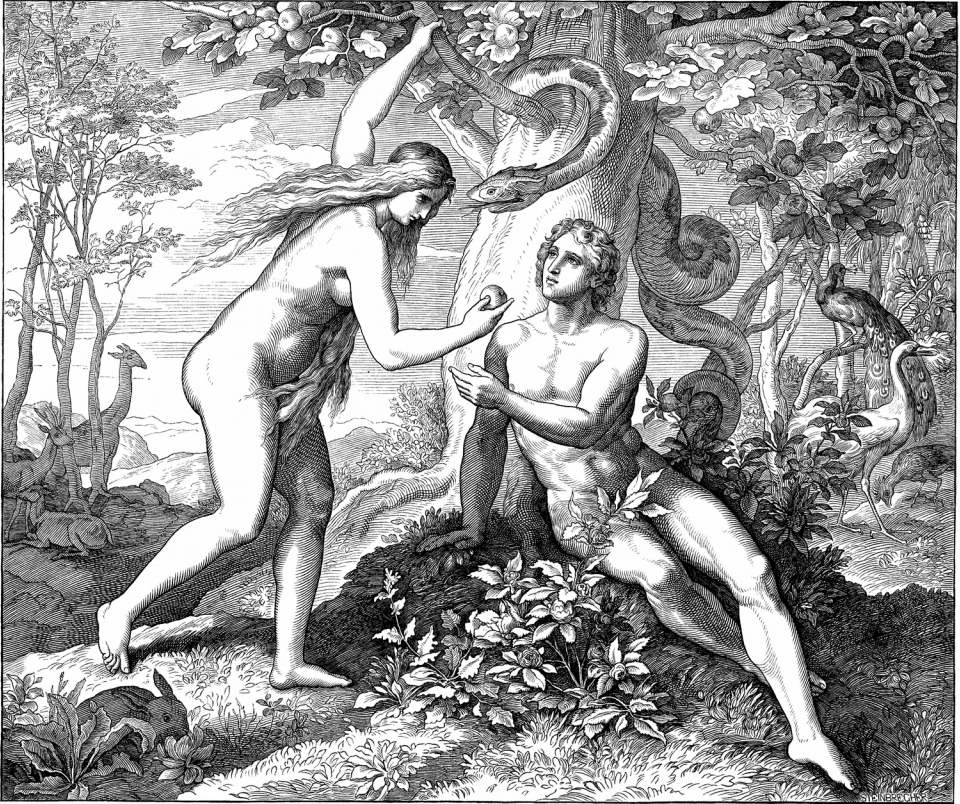
ashamed before one another nor before You (Gen. 2:25). Look with favor upon us, for we have no good apart from You. Bless us as You blessed Adam and Eve, make our home a little garden of delight, and in the end restore us fully to paradise; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Do: As you interact as husband and wife and notice more similarities and differences that show you to be “fit” for each other, mention them to one another.

Day 2

The History of Marriage: The Fall

Read Genesis 3:1-21



The Lord God had commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Adam loved his wife, and so he told her this command from the Lord. This command was for their good (every word from God is). They rejoiced in his Word together, and all was well. “The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”

But then comes Genesis 3 when the serpent called that Word of God into question. The serpent said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” “That’s not quite it,” the woman replied. “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the

midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.” But the slithery serpent replied with his crafty forked tongue, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” And these words captured the woman. She saw that the tree was good for food and a delight to the eyes and was to be desired to make one wise, and so “she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.” And this is when everything went sideways.

The serpent wasn’t a complete liar. He simply twisted the truth, which is far more dangerous. The eyes of both of them were opened. But what did they know in that moment that they didn’t know before? “And they knew that they were naked.” That is, they were now ashamed in the presence of one another. They now had something to hide from one another. The one flesh of Man and Woman was suddenly filled with the desire to be alone and separate. The Man thought, “Don’t look at me! Get away from me!” The Woman thought, “Oh, if only you weren’t here, how much better it would be!” This is what sin does: it divides. Sometimes it’s a mutual sin where man and wife are both at fault, sometimes it’s an individual sin. But whatever the case may be, it always leads to division and blame, not only with husband and wife, but also with God.

This sin that Man and Woman committed as husband and wife not only made them want to hide from each other, but also from the Lord: “the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence (literally “the face”) of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.” And when God called the man to account, then the man started the blame: “the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” The woman keeps the blame going: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Here now are the man and his wife: scared, ashamed, defensive, on the brink of damnation, having sinned against God and one another. What will the Lord do? He turns to the serpent and says, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” The Lord speaks the first promise of a Savior, a child of the woman (but not of the man) who will conquer the devil, that crafty old serpent, and undo his work. The man and his wife have a new Word of God to cling to and rejoice in together: the promise of Jesus, born of a virgin, who will forgive sins and destroy the works of the devil.

Yet while there is the promise of salvation there are also consequences for sin, and the consequence for marriage is this (spoken

to the woman): “Your desire shall be against your husband, but he shall rule over you.” And so the fallen nature of woman is now branded with the thought, “You just stood there while I sinned! You should have protected me! See if I ever trust you or listen to you again!” And the fallen nature of man says, “I told you what God said because I loved you and wanted to prevent this for your own good! If you won’t hear me speak to you in love then fine, do whatever you want and see if I care!” If you as husband and wife have not yet seen these sinful fruits, you will. Wife, you will desire to be in authority over your husband, to “wear the pants” in your marriage. Husband, you will cast love to the wind and treat your wife with complete apathy. And what can we say to this? For now, these words: “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24-25).



Talk: Because of the fall into sin, what is a wife’s sinful attitude toward her husband? Because of the fall into sin, what is a husband’s sinful attitude toward his wife? Without going at each other’s throats, can you think of any times when you have exercised this sinful attitude? (Note that it says *you*, not your spouse).

Pray: Have mercy on us, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to Your great mercy blot out our transgressions (Ps. 51:1). Sin indeed came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men (Rom. 5:12). Yet we cannot point the finger at our patriarch, Adam, but must confess our own sins. You have given us Your Word and we have despised it. You have given us to love and serve each other and we have become each other’s downfall. The good we want to do we do not do, but the evil we do not want is what we keep on doing (Rom. 7:19). We despise ourselves and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:6). Wretched people that we are! Who will deliver us from this body of death? (Rom. 7:24). We give You thanks and praise, O Father, that You have not left this question unanswered but have replied with Your own Son. You sent the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) to wash us thoroughly from our iniquity, and cleanse us from our sin (Ps. 51:2). You replanted the tree of life on Mount Golgotha – Christ crucified – from whose body we eat not to death, but to life. In him let us hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice (Ps.

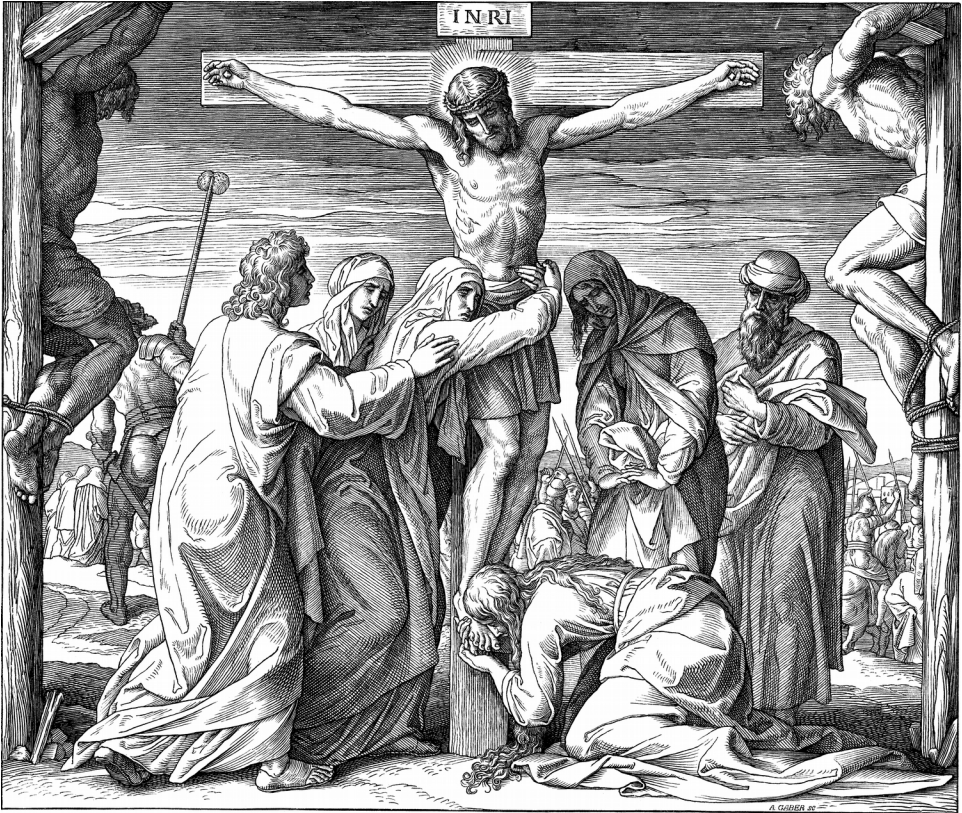
51:8). In Him restore to us the joy of Your salvation and uphold us with a willing spirit (Ps. 51:12). Keep our eyes fixed on the great salvation that You have worked for us in Your Son. Make us conscious of our sins so that we can offer the right sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:17). Do not give us over to despair on account of our sins, but by your Holy Spirit remind us that as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness has led to justification and life for all men (Rom. 5:18). Who will deliver us from this body of death? Thanks be to You, through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 7:25). Amen.

Do: Set a timer for five minutes. Sit together in silence and each of you examine yourself in light of what you just read. How have you sinned against your husband or wife from the corruption of your flesh? When the timer sounds, talk to one another about it. Confess your sins to each other, and (here's a hint from a future lesson) the proper response to a confession of sin is, "I forgive your sin."

Day 3

The History of Marriage: Christ and His Church

Read Ezekiel 16:1-15



The marriage of the Man and his wife was horribly corrupted by their sin. They would now be plagued with blame, selfishness, shame, enmity, and thoughts of divorce. And as bad as this was, it was only a picture of what had really happened between man and God. The Lord often uses marriage language in Scripture, describing himself as the husband and his people as the wife. And he isn't simply adopting language we would understand by way of analogy. The Lord isn't *like* a husband. He *is* the husband! "For your Maker is your husband," as Isaiah writes in chapter 54:5. Your earthly marriage is the shadow and the Lord and his people are the reality.

In order to understand your earthly marriage and enjoy its benefits, you must understand mankind's marriage to the Lord and its benefits. The prophet Ezekiel draws this out in Ezekiel 16. We were a wretched girl lying dead in a field. But then the Lord came by and called us to life: "I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I made you flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare." This describes when the Lord first called the patriarch Abraham away from his idols. The people of God increased, yet we became slaves in Egypt. More trouble than we were worth, right? What does the Lord do with this slave girl? He marries her!

"When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the LORD God, and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil." This was when the Lord brought us out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery according to his Word, "I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:7). Sounds like a marriage vow, does it not? And so the Lord became our husband and with what was his covered what was ours. He made a vow to us, even though we would break every vow we made to him. He bathed us and clothed us, and Ezekiel goes on to describe the fine linens and rich silks and ornaments and bracelets and beautiful crown and gold and silver and embroidered cloth and fine flour and honey and oil that the Lord gave to us. The Lord says, "You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you." We as the Lord's bride started worse than Cinderella, worse even than the cinders she swept. And yet the Lord took us to himself, not waiting for us to show up beautiful at the ball and then falling for us, but loving us while we were wretched, marrying us when we were but dust, and then making us beautiful himself.

And how have we acted as the Lord's bride? Unfaithfully. We've whored ourselves out to other gods and played the prostitute, not even charging for our services but giving our love and trust and worship away to idols that have no breath in them and can do nothing for us. "Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so you have been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the LORD" (Jeremiah

3:20). And so what did our husband do? Did he give us a certificate of divorce and send us away? No. He came after us. He said, “I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD” (Hosea 2:19-20). The Lord took on human flesh, appearing as the image after which we were modeled, taking the body that was to be his long before it was ours. And thus the promised offspring of the woman entered our sinful world to reclaim his bride. “I will betroth you to me,” Jesus said three times: once for each temptation that he suffered in the wilderness from the ancient serpent who had lured us into adultery, once for every time we denied him while he stood trial in our place.

And it’s there, as Jesus is condemned, that we see he is the perfect husband to his bride. She has sin, death, and damnation. He has forgiveness, life, and salvation. But he has betrothed us to himself, and so we can say, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song of Songs 2:16). He takes the sin, death, and damnation, and gives us the forgiveness, life, and salvation. We have exchanged wedding rings, and his gold glitters on us while our filth *kills him*. And this is exactly as Jesus planned for it to go, dying for his bride to give her life and rising from the dead to make her his forever. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 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” (Ephesians 5:25-27). The marriage of Christ and his Church is the true marriage, and it has been granted you for his sake to live an analogy of this ultimate marriage as husband and wife.



Talk: What are the worst sins that husband and wife can commit against each other? How have you committed these sins against Jesus? How has he responded?

Pray: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!” (Ps. 107:1). You have looked upon us in our low estate and had compassion and mercy in Your Son. Jesus saw us wallowing in our own blood and said, “Live!” (Eze. 16:6). He saw us naked and spread the corner of His garment over us (Eze. 16:8). He

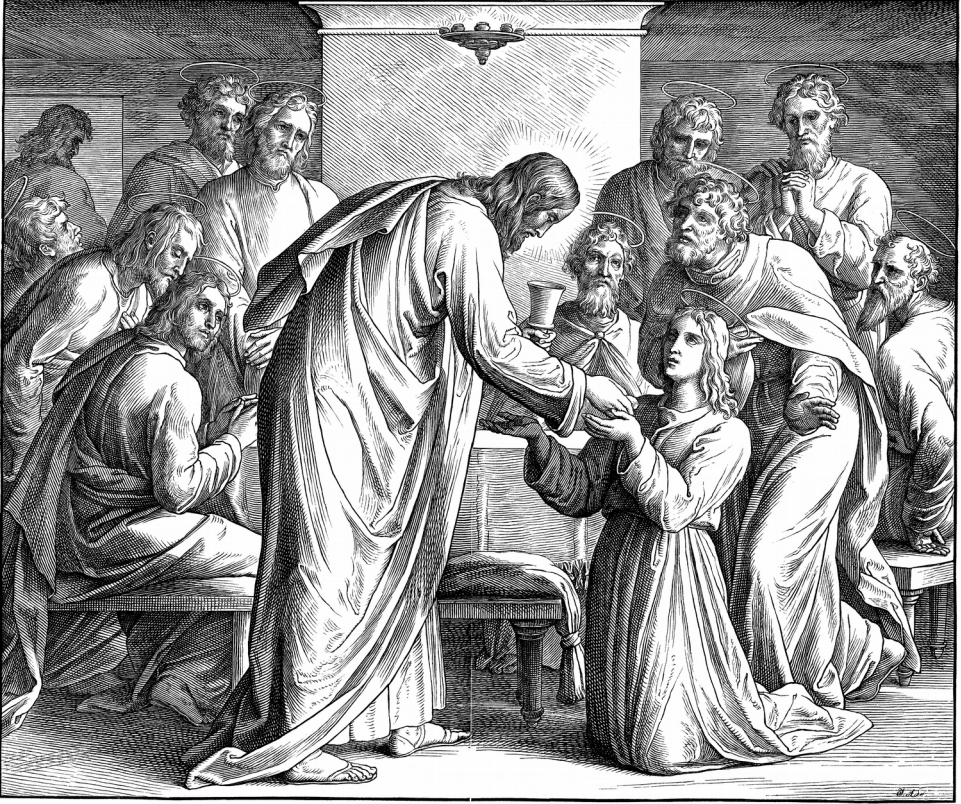
bathed us in the waters of Holy Baptism and clothed us with his righteousness. What shall we render to the Lord for all his benefits to us? We will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord (Ps. 116:12-13). O Lord, for Your name's sake pardon our unfaithfulness and make us trust in nothing other than You. You have betrothed us to You in faithfulness (Hos. 2:20). You have made Your Son our Bridegroom and put these words in our mouth: "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song 2:16). So take away what is ours: sin, death, and damnation. Grant us what is His: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Clothe us with fine linen, bright and pure (Rev. 19:8), with good works that You have prepared for us to do in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10). Let Your salvation not be fruitless, but produce an abundance of faith toward You and love for each other. Conform our marriage to the pattern of Christ and His Church, that through the reality of marriage we would live in a blessed reflection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Do: Look through your wedding pictures. Which picture of the two of you do you think best illustrates Christ and his Church? Why?

Day 4

The History of Marriage: Divine Service

Read Ephesians 5:22-55



The most significant marriage – the realest, truest marriage – is the marriage of Christ the bridegroom to the Church, his bride. But what does that marriage look like? How does Jesus show himself as husband today? How does the Church live as his bride today? Ezekiel used such language of washing and clothing and beautifying and feeding, and St. Paul picked up that language in Ephesians 5. But what does that washing and clothing and beautifying and feeding look like? The answer is much simpler than you might expect: the marriage of Christ to his Church looks like a church service.

It is there in the Divine Service that Jesus washes people and makes them members of his body, the Church. Jesus does this in Baptism, which is “the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy

Spirit" (Titus 3:5), "having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Ephesians 5:26). Baptism is when Jesus washes his bride from her filth, and it's also when he spreads the corner of his garment over her and covers her nakedness: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

So there we stand before Christ as a gorgeous bride in our pure white wedding gown that he has put on us. But then we go out into the world. Certainly you've seen a bride outside in her dress (or been the bride outside in her dress): avoiding dirt and grass stains, holding up the hem and stepping carefully. Or trying to eat in the dress! The butterflies that were in the stomach all morning have cleared out and the bride is now quite hungry. She has to balance her ravenous appetite with meticulous fork-work so as not to soil her dress. And no matter how careful she is, at the end of the day her dress is not as pure as it was that morning, sullied with wrinkles from sitting in it, spots from accidents, rips from the awkwardness of walking around in such a gown.

Such is life as a Christian. So Sunday in and Sunday out we draw near to our faithful husband at the church building and confess, "I am a poor, miserable sinner. You clothed me in the pure white dress and I've made a mess of it. I'm not pure. I'm not holy. My beloved, I have sinned against you, and I am so sorry." How does Jesus respond? With love and comfort. "My love," he says, "you can't soil that dress. You're not clothed with your own righteousness, but with mine. And so I forgive it all. You are holy and without blemish, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, not because of your own beauty or perfection but because of the splendor I have bestowed on you through my holy, precious blood. Draw near, my bride, and do not fear." Thus assured of our beautification we draw near and listen to our beloved speak to us in the readings, submitting to his Word, knowing that whatever he commands and whatever he promises is for our great good. Then we pray and ask favors of him according to what he has spoken to us.

Well thus far the washing, clothing, and beautifying. What of the eating? Ezekiel had mentioned something about "fine flour and honey and oil," extravagant and rich foods to be sure. Whoever's catering this wedding feast is getting paid an arm and a leg for it. Continue on in the service and you'll get your meal. Jesus sets the altar with fine linens and costly vessels and you approach in the pure white dress of Baptism with which he clothed you. And then Jesus sets out the richest food of all rich foods: his own body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. For good reason it's called communion, which

means “oneness together.” At the altar Christ and his Church become one flesh, a mystery that you experienced in lesser degree when God joined you together as husband and wife. Having received the love of your husband, you as the bride walk out the doors of the church building and have love to give to your neighbors, starting with your closest neighbor: your husband or wife. And so you see why marriage ceremonies were traditionally part of the Sunday Divine Service: because that’s where we see the reality of the marriage of Christ to his Church today.



Talk: How does Jesus wash his Church? By what means does he speak to his Church? With what does he feed his Church? What is the significance of the Divine Service for your earthly marriage?

Pray: How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! Our soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; our heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God (Ps. 84:1-2). We were dirty and You washed us. We were naked and You clothed us. We were starving for righteousness and You have satisfied us (Mt. 5:6). Receive our praise for showing us such love. Receive also our prayers. Bring to our remembrance the mighty works of salvation that You work for us in Your Divine Service. Let us never despise Your Word, but aid us by Your Spirit to hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. We know the devilish birds that swoop upon us to steal Your Word away. We know how shallow our rocky hearts can be and how scorching are the trials and temptations that beat upon us. We know the thorns of this age that compete with Your Word: worries and riches and desires for other things. And we beg You: Lord, have mercy. Make our hearts good soil to receive Your Word and cling to it and bear fruit with perseverance (Lk. 8:4-15). Keep us faithful to Your Son. He is our Bridegroom; give us contentment in Him and let us never seek another. By Your love enliven our love – love for each other within our marriage, love for all our neighbors in the various stations you have given us in life. Grant us grace to live as Your baptized children in righteousness and purity. Sanctify us in thought, word, and deed, that even in this life we would begin to appear as the holy bride of Christ, until at last You make us forever pure and holy in Your everlasting courts. Amen.

Do: Go to church together on Sunday. As you go through the service consider what Jesus is doing as husband and what you're doing as his bride, the Church.

Transition



With this four-part history of marriage we have seen all the themes that are embodied in marriage. The remainder of the devotions will examine these themes in greater detail, mulling over the meanings and outcomes. It's very much like planning a wedding where many pieces come together: the sanctuary, the wedding party, the dress, the hall, the caterer, the seating arrangement, the flowers, the music. Except this will be far more pleasant than trying to figure out where to seat Uncle Bill and Aunt Janine and what to do about little Johnny with his severe tree nut allergy – besides dealing with the fallout from the guacamole incident that happened seven years ago. This will be far more pleasant because Jesus has already made the arrangements and everything fits together perfectly and you simply get to show up and enjoy the benefits of his labors. By the end you'll see that Jesus is no mere wedding planner, but a marriage planner, who has set everything just so and wrapped it all up in himself.

Day 5

The Duties of Wife



he duties of wives and husbands are listed in Ephesians 5:22-33, Colossians 3:18-19, and 1 Peter 3:1-7. Wife, your chief duty sounds very unpleasant. It goes against everything in your corrupted flesh. Do you remember what was branded in womankind as a result of the fall? The thought against the husband, “You just stood there while I sinned! You should have protected me! See if I ever trust you or listen to you again!” Well here’s your chief wifely duty: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22, similarly Colossians 3:18 and 1 Peter 3:1). Let me preface the explanation of this by saying, this is a very desirable thing you have been given to do.

The word “submit” translates the Greek word *hypotasso*, which is made up of two words: *hypo*, which means “under” and *tasso*, which means “order.” Perhaps a better translation into English would be “willingly subordinate yourselves.” Let’s explore what this means in a little more detail. Typically when we think of submitting or being subordinate we think of being oppressed by some egomaniacal, power-hungry tyrant. We don’t want to be “under” anyone because that means being at that person’s mercy, dependent on him in some way. We much prefer independence and autonomy. And without Christ I suppose that would be the way to go.

But Christ transformed the whole idea of order. If you read the next verse, Ephesians 5:23, this begins to make sense: “For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the Church, he being the Savior of the body.” According to God’s order, the way God has arranged things, Christ is the head and the Church is his body. The Church is subordinate to Christ. And what an awful place we’re in! We’re dependent on someone who gives his life to save us because we couldn’t save ourselves. We have to be loved by someone who thought nothing of himself or his personal benefit but only thought of us. We must subordinate ourselves to a Lord who isn’t some egomaniacal, power-hungry tyrant, but is instead the suffering servant who does all things for the good of his bride, the Church. Well, when you put it that way it doesn’t sound bad at all. And that’s because it’s not!

According to God’s order through Christ, being *subordinate* means receiving God’s blessings through the one who is *superordinate*, the one

above. The subordinate position is a position of being served instead of serving, being loved instead of loving, getting gifts instead of giving them. Think about what happens during the Divine Service at church. You come in and stand as the bride of Christ before her husband and confess your sins and put yourself at his mercy and subordinate yourself to him. And then what does he do? “I forgive you all your sins.” “But husband! Those sins are mine.” “No they’re not, they’re mine. There are two paths here: one to life, one to death. I’ve taken the one to death so that you can take the one to life. So receive it. I’m giving it to you.” And how does the bride of Christ respond? “Amen.” “Yes, ok, I will gladly be the subordinate.” And all goes well for the wife while the husband plays the part of the suffering servant.

Now if the bride of Christ didn’t want to subordinate herself to him she would still claim her sins as her own, she would refuse the love of Christ, she would be an independent woman, and because of her independence from Christ she would be damned. (Hopefully, you see how little value is placed on independence in Christ’s order.) But when the Church is subordinate to Christ she receives his love. And wife, this is how it works with your earthly husband. By willingly taking your place in God’s order under your husband, you receive the love of your husband.

Dependence and subordination should be looking pretty good by now. Let’s talk practically about how you subordinate yourself to your husband. In Ephesians 5 Paul doesn’t offer a how-to course on this. He doesn’t list any specifics. And that’s because willingly subordinating yourself under your husband isn’t so much a set of actions as it is a proper mindset that permeates everything you say and do. The core of it is recognizing that your husband is an image of Jesus. You look to him the way the Church looks to Christ. This means showing respect and reverence, deferring to your husband, not being defiant or presumptuous, not refusing his love toward you or doubting that he forgives your sins. Subordinating yourself doesn’t mean thinking you’re worth less than your husband before God (nor does it mean that your husband is “better” than you), rather, it simply means acknowledging him as your head. More details to come in future lessons.



Talk: Wife, think of a time when you were glad to subordinate yourself to your husband. Talk together about why that willing subordination worked out for the best.

Pray: *The prayer of a wife for herself in light of her duties*

Heavenly Father, You have graciously ordered light and darkness, sky and waters, sea and dry land, seasons, days, and years, and all living things that move upon the earth (Gen. 1:3-27). But the most glorious order You have reserved for mankind, arranging man and woman according to Christ and His Church (Eph. 5:22-33). Within this marvelous order you have given me the duty of willingly subordinating myself to my husband as to the Lord (Eph. 5:22). I confess, my flesh cringes at the thought of this, and then I am grieved that I in my sinfulness would despise what You have instituted in Your goodness. Forgive my sins, for I have balked at Your Word like Eve did in time past. Comfort me with the seed of the woman who takes away sins and wounds the head of the ancient serpent (Gen. 3:15). Yes, Your Son has claimed my rebellion as His own and consoles my troubled conscience with words of grace and peace. Show me in Christ how wonderful subordination is according to Your order. Grant me willingness to subordinate myself, first to Jesus, then to my husband. Crucify in me all desires against the heavenly Bridegroom and my earthly bridegroom, that I would not miss the love and gifts that You give me through them. And I pray, dear Father, war against all things that would try to convince me that Your order is oppressive or bad for me. Keep me steadfast in Your Word against all the wiles of the devil and give me all that is necessary to carry out my duties; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The prayer of a husband in light of his wife's duties

Lord Jesus, You have given my wife the duty of willingly subordinating herself to me as to You (Eph. 5:22), yet even my righteous deeds are like a soiled garment (Is. 64:6). You know how to give good gifts to men, and what you intend you are able to do. But what can I provide for my wife? It seems half the time I don't want to serve her, and the other half I have the right intentions and still do not do what I want, but what I hate (Rom. 7:15). I am a poor reflection of You. Do not let my wife be scandalized on my account. Do not make me a stumbling block that causes her to despise Your Word. Strengthen her in her duty in spite of me. You have said that Your Father works in me, both to will and to work on behalf of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). To that end grant me Your Holy Spirit; conform me to your image, both for the sake of Your

Word and for the sake of my wife; and fill up in me all that is sorely lacking. Nail to Your holy cross all that I do wrong and glorify Your name by bringing forth all that is right; and in this way cause us to rejoice in Your good order and benefit greatly, both in Your Church and in our home; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Do: Wife, look for the blessings that God gives you through your husband and respond with thanksgiving, both to your earthly husband and the Church's heavenly bridegroom. Husband, when you see your wife willingly subordinate herself, say, "That's something the Church does."

Day 6

The Duties of Husband



usband, your chief duty toward your wife is not only exceedingly difficult, but the consequences of neglecting your duty are much more serious than if your wife refused to subordinate herself to you. Consider these words to you: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her... In the same way husbands should love their 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 Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body” (Ephesians 5:25, 28-30).

Husband, your chief duty is to love your wife. Love doesn't mean feeling happy when your wife is around. Love isn't some emotional state. Love is defined by Christ: he loved by giving himself up for his bride. Love is self-sacrifice. Certainly that means that if the need should arise you're obligated to die in order to save your wife. But for most husbands it never comes to that, nor is that the hardest part of giving yourself up. Your self-sacrificing love for your wife is seen most clearly in the day to day, nitty-gritty, commonplace happenings of everyday life. There's a sink full of dishes. Who's going to do them? Your wife wants to watch a TV show that drives you nuts. What do you do? Your wife is feeling lonely on a night when you'd like to make plans to go out with some friends. Who gets your company? So you see, self-sacrifice isn't about physically dying. It's about putting to death your selfish desires for the sake of your wife.

Ah, but again there's the sinful flesh passed down to you from the Man. “The Woman didn't listen. She wanted to do her own thing. Well let her! Forget her! Why would I spend myself on such a rebellious woman?” Because when you were the rebellious woman Christ spent himself on you. And here we come to something of a paradox for you as husband. In relation to your wife you're the husband, but in relation to Christ you're a member of his bride, the Church.

Now you have the command from God to love your wife, and for that reason alone you ought to do so. But unless you receive the love of Christ as a member of his Church, you won't have any love to give your wife. Just as your wife learns to subordinate herself to you by subordinating herself to Christ in the Divine Service, so in that same

Service Christ gives you his love, which not only reconciles you with God but also gives you the love that your duties require. To put it concisely: A husband is incapable of being a good husband unless he also knows how to be the bride of Christ. And so, husband, the most important thing you can do for your wife is go to church every Sunday and receive Christ's love. Your marriage depends on it.

Looking back to the words to you in Ephesians 5, you'll notice that your duties as husband are inseparably entwined with the work of Christ himself: "as Christ loved the Church," "just as Christ does the Church." And this is why the consequences of neglecting your duties are so devastating: you're a picture of Christ to your wife. If she neglects her duties and doesn't subordinate herself to you then she illustrates how the Church struggles with subordinating herself to Christ, her husband. She shows that for now the Church still has a sinful, rebellious flesh, which is true. But if you neglect your duties and don't love your wife, you say something about Christ, and what you say is false.

The people of God have a history of murmuring and grumbling and rebelling and the Lord has a history of loving them anyway. The best way to turn your wife away from Christ is to show by your actions that the love of Christ is selfish and conditional and must be earned, to show that there's no such thing as grace or mercy of steadfast love or faithfulness. Husband, for the sake of your marriage and the eternal welfare of your wife you must patiently endure your wife's rebellion and give yourself up for her, just as Christ died at the hands of his people in order to save them. Your duty of love cannot in any way depend on your wife's duty of subordinating herself. If it does, then you have blasphemed Jesus.

You had fair warning that this was exceedingly difficult. "Difficult?" you say. "This is impossible!" And you would be right, if not for Christ. Take heart, husband! At the end of the day only Christ is Christ. You are an imperfect mirror, your Old Adam won't let you do what you want, and both Jesus and your wife understand this. The command to love your wife doesn't disappear, but Jesus adds to it his forgiveness. Your shortcomings and failings as husband drive you to this forgiveness, drive you to the altar to get the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And according to Christ's arrangement and order, that's also where you get the love you lack. Thus your life is a constant darting-back-and-forth between being a member of Christ's bride and being husband to your wife, between receiving Christ's sacrifice and sacrificing yourself.



Talk: Husband, think of a time when you were glad to sacrifice your desires for the sake of your wife. Talk together about why that self-sacrifice was good for both of you.

Pray: *The prayer of a husband for himself in light of his duties*

O Jesus, You have loved Your Church by giving Yourself up for her (Eph 5:25). You have cleansed me in Holy Baptism by the washing of water with the Word (Eph. 5:26). In the Church I am subordinated to You and I receive salvation and holiness according to Your order. For this I give You thanks. Yet in my home, in relation to my wife, You have set me in Your place as the giver of love instead of the receiver of love. You know how I have exercised selfishness instead of selflessness, neglecting my wife instead of giving myself up for her. You know also the sorrow of my heart because of this. Wipe away all my wrongdoing, not on account of my contrition, but for the sake of Your holy, precious blood and Your innocent suffering and death. My soul blesses You because You have not made my salvation depend on my love, but on Yours. Keep me always as a member of Your bride, the Church, that my heart would not be consumed by an evil conscience but sprinkled clean from it (Heb. 10:22). At the same time open my eyes to see how You love Your bride and mold me to act similarly toward my bride. Destroy my selfish desires and increase my desire to love and serve my wife, as you have loved and served me, and continue to be among us as the one who serves (Lk. 22:27). Amen.

The prayer of a wife in light of her husband's duties

Lord Jesus, You have made known to me Your salvation and Your love through the proclamation of Your Word. And more than speaking Your Gospel into my ears, You have given my eyes an image of Your love in my husband. Open my eyes to see You active through him. Make me see him standing in Your place, and through his love grant me delight in Your love. Recall to me the comfort of Your cross as my husband gives himself up for me (Eph. 5:25), and strengthen him in this, that Your self-sacrificing image would not depart from our home. When my husband does not live up to this high calling, do not allow me to be scandalized and forsake Your Word. Grant me discernment to see when he is acting in Your stead and when he is acting from the old man, that

confusion would not lead to false belief and rob me of You. Give me a spirit of humility and willing subordination, that I would recognize my own iniquities and submit myself to my husband at all times, not only when it seems right to me. Grasp my husband firmly by the hand and uphold him with Your outstretched arm, that he would never lose sight of the duty You have given him to do, and that he would delight in it and see how it benefits me. Grant him a strong faith, that like rain upon the earth Your Gospel would bring forth the fruits that his sacred duties require. Continue to speak Your clear and perfect Word into our dim reflection of You and Your Church, and give us devotion to it as to a lamp shining in a dark place (2 Pet. 1:19). Preserve us in Your Word, that what we now see dimly in a mirror we would see face to face at Your coming (1 Cor. 13:12). Amen.

Do: Husband, find an opportunity to crucify yourself by doing something unpleasant so your wife won't have to. Wife, don't argue with your husband when he insists on doing this, and when you see him giving himself up for you, say, "That's something Christ does."

Day 7

Headship



aving heard both of your duties in brief form, you can now see how they interplay. Wife, you willingly subordinate yourself to your husband in all things as to the Lord. Husband, you love your wife as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. You're both required by God to do your duty, regardless of whether the other is doing his or her duty. But when you're both doing your duty: there is nothing more peaceful and joyful and harmonious on earth.

This harmony of subordination and love is expressed by the term "headship." Consider your body. The head is on top, and the head governs the body. "Fingers, pin on that corsage. Hands, tie that tie. Feet, stand here. Mouth, say, 'I will.' Hands, lift the veil. Lips, kiss the bride." But the head doesn't just operate for itself, as if the rest of the body could perish and it would be perfectly fine. If the head says, "Hand, reach out and touch that fire," the fire burns the hand, but what registers the pain? The head. The body cannot suffer without the head feeling it. So it says in Ephesians 5:23, "Christ is the head of the Church, he being the Savior of the body." Jesus, as the head, felt the pain of the body as he encountered people in distress and had compassion. He took our diseases and infirmities on himself and spared us from death and hell. He saved us from all things harmful because as the head he was responsible for the body, as the head he felt the pain of the body, and as the head he loved the body.

In marriage, you, husband, are the head. "Why does he get to be the head?" Because that's the way God ordered things. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2 that he does not permit a woman to exercise authority over a man. Why not? "For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (2 Timothy 2:13). Likewise in 1 Corinthians 11:3, "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." And why is the husband the head of his wife? "For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" (1 Corinthians 11:8-9). So why is the husband the head? Because that's how God chose to order and arrange it, as you heard from Genesis.

But wife, you actually come out ahead here, even though you aren't the head. Being the body means being under a head in God's order, but

you heard the sort of order God has established. It's an order of self-sacrificing love on the husband's part, which means being the body is nothing other than receiving the love of the head. It would be like if God told the husband, "You must give a beautiful new dress to your wife," and then told the wife, "You must put on your beautiful new dress." To the husband, "You shall give your wife a foot massage." To the wife, "You shall receive a foot massage from your husband." "You shall do the dishes so your wife can relax." "You shall relax while your husband does the dishes." "You shall love your wife." "You shall willingly subordinate yourself to your husband." Therefore being the body is a great position in God's order.

"But doesn't that make me dependent in some way to my husband?" Absolutely! Now tell me what's wrong with that? Is it a bad thing that the Church is completely dependent on Christ? Quite the contrary! The Church flourishes by being dependent on Christ and receiving from him. In the world independence is highly valued, but in the Church dependence is the noble virtue because the Church is only saved by relying on, trusting in, and receiving from Jesus.

Now husband, by this point you probably feel like you're getting the short end of the stick. "What about when I want to relax instead of doing the dishes? What about when I want a foot massage? What about when I want a beautiful new dress?" (Actually, don't ask that last one.) If your wife, as a response to the love she has received from you, wants to serve you in those ways, well and good. But here's something odd to think about. When Jesus was on the cross bleeding profusely, suffering immense pain, and crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" where would he rather have been? The seemingly strange answer is: nowhere. He wanted to be there sacrificing himself, because he wasn't thinking about himself. He was thinking about you. Jesus had so many opportunities to skip the cross. "Take on human flesh and go into a sinful world? Nah." "Bow down to you, Satan, and all of this will be mine? Ok." "What Peter? You don't want me to die on the cross? Yeah, you're right, I'd rather not die."

But that's not how it went, and that's not how it goes with you either. You see the glory that the world gives men who give their lives for their country. Self-sacrifice is the chief manly virtue, and even the world understands it, even if the world doesn't understand that it's the chief manly virtue because of Christ. When you became a husband, Jesus gave you a gift. He gave you the gift of enjoying your cross, not because you're a masochist, but for the sake of your wife. You'll realize over the course of your marriage that the best feeling in the world comes

from knowing you're benefitting your wife by giving yourself up. There's nothing you'd rather be doing. And thus headship – subordination and love – gives you both what you need and establishes peace and harmony.



Talk: What does it mean to be the “head” in God’s order? What does it mean to be the “body” in God’s order? Speak of Christ when speaking about the head and speak of the Church when speaking about the body.


Pray: Jesus Christ, the head of the Church and her Savior (Eph. 5:23), You exercise authority by serving and You reign by giving Yourself up for us. How blessed are we, your servants, whose Lord ties a towel around his waist and washes our feet (Jn. 13:4-5). You whose sandals we are not worthy to stoop down and untie (Jn. 1:27), You, O Jesus, have stooped down to us. We praise You for Your merciful humility that benefits us, though we are servants to You. Give us delight in Your authority over us and protect us from despising it. In Your grace You have made the position of subordination a position of receiving good gifts from Your hands. Keep us in this position as members of Your Church, that we would receive all that You have to give. Preserve all wives in the blessed place of subordination so that they reflect Your Church and receive good things through their husbands. Give to all husbands a proper exercise of Your authority, not using it to lord but to serve. As they bear a cross for the sake of their wives, give them endurance, give them Your love, and give them the same will to take up the cross that You showed when You took up Yours. What we pray for all husbands and wives, we pray also for ourselves. Defend us against the lies of the devil, who says that authority is evil. His falsehoods have gained much ground in the world, and marriage as You have ordained it is greatly maligned and perverted. Make us hear Your Word and not his crafty tongue. Arise, O Lord! Save us, O our God! Place the portrait of You and Your Church before our eyes in Your Divine Service and by Your grace conform us to it. Grant this all for the sake of Your name. Amen.

Do: Husband, show your wife how Christ uses his authority in this simple way: make an authoritative decision that impacts both of you, with the conditions that it must benefit her and must require something

of you. For example, “My dear wife, sit down and relax while I do the dishes,” or, “My love, you want to play Scrabble and I want to watch TV. We’re playing Scrabble.” Wife, show your husband how the Church willingly subordinates herself to Christ by responding with something like, “Yes dear,” or, “Very good, my husband.”

Day 8

Headship Disrupted

hen the head feels responsibility for its body, feels the pain of its body, and loves its body, all is well. When the body follows and subordinates itself to its head, all is well. But where either or both are lacking, all is not well. What happens when a head doesn't love its body, when a husband behaves selfishly and not selflessly? There are two consequences to this, one for the husband, one for the wife.

The consequence for the husband when he acts selfishly toward his wife is pain, just as the head registers the pain when the body is injured. This pain isn't so much physical as it is a gnawing at the conscience. The husband will either go off by himself in an effort to deal with it, or engage in some form of distraction to try to forget it. Notice that both of these responses involve the husband distancing himself from his wife. If this distancing continues, the husband becomes something of a disembodied head and his troubled conscience only grows worse. And so you see that the result of selfishness is painful loneliness, the thing the Lord God said was "not good." If the husband rejects the Lord's cure for loneliness (his wife) he'll be left in pain and have only himself to blame. Notably when a husband distances himself from his wife, he usually also distances himself from God – not going to church, not reading Scripture, not praying.

The consequences for the wife when her husband acts selfishly toward her is insecurity because the order that God has established has been disrupted. It's like when Adam just stood there and Eve was thrown into uncertainty. As a result the wife is likely to stop subordinating herself to her husband (not that she should, it's just usually what happens). For her, lack of order is preferable to an order that puts her under someone who doesn't love her. Yet she still craves some sort of order for the sake of feeling secure, so she'll try to create her own order, looking for a different head or trying to be the head herself. Rather than isolating herself she'll surround herself with friends and ask advice, taking whatever she perceives as loving, even if it turns her further against her husband. What's really dangerous here is another man who seems to provide love or security. One body with two heads doesn't work, and the wife will be inclined toward the more loving

one, even if he's not the one God gave her. Notably, in the midst of such chaos the wife also in many cases lets church fall by the wayside.

Now a wife can bring this consequence of disorder on herself if she refuses to subordinate herself to her husband even when he *is* loving her, as Israel often did with the Lord. In fact, it's not usually from a lack of feeling loved himself that a husband goes looking for another body. Rather he's more likely to look for another body when his wife won't let him love her. This rejection of love on the part of the wife makes as much sense as Israel making a golden calf when they had the living God. Yet this stubborn rebellion comes from an unreasonable sinful flesh that would rather be autonomous than receive the benefits of a loving God. The obvious result of a wife's insubordination is that she doesn't receive the gifts of God through her husband that she would have otherwise had.

Notice the end result in both cases. Whether the husband and wife end up divorced from each other or not, they very often divorce themselves from Christ. The old serpent is still just as sneaky and wily as he was in Genesis chapter 3. He attacks your earthly marriage because he knows it's one of the best ways to tear apart your heavenly marriage. Your earthly marriage is a reflection of the mystical union of Christ and his Church, and if Satan can make the reflection into a funhouse mirror he can distort your perception of Christ himself.

How can you combat such deception? By looking often at the real thing. Go to church together as husband and wife. Sit by each other, sing together, hear the Word together, receive the Lord's Supper together. See that Christ is a perfect head even if you, husband, as a reflection are not. The true Husband will preserve your faith and salvation, even when your earthly marriage is an incredibly poor reflection of Christ and his Church. See what benefits the Church has from willingly subordinating herself, even if you, wife, tend to be insubordinate. The true Bride will teach you how to receive forgiveness and how to receive all good things. Being members of Christ's Church, subordinating yourselves to his order and receiving his love, you as husband learn to be a good, loving head, and you as wife learn to be a good, subordinate body receiving that love.

There are other practical things you can do when headship is disrupted. Husband, go to your wife. Do not cut yourself off from her even though everything in you wants to do just that. Remember what the Lord says about loneliness: not good. Wife, remember that you have your head, and don't seek another. If your problem is with your husband, then talk to him. Do not listen to anyone who advises you

against your husband, even if it should appear to be an angel from heaven. Remember Genesis chapter 3: having desire against your husband is a consequence of sin, not what Jesus wants you to have. If you do these things you'll be in the same room and wanting to reconcile. How do you do that? We'll take that up in the next several lessons.




Talk: Husband, when is it hardest for you to love your wife? Wife, when is it hardest to subordinate yourself to your husband?

Pray: Heavenly Father, You wonderfully arranged man and woman in marriage, You made that holy estate an image of Your Son and His Church, and You have placed us into it. And O God, what corruption we have brought to it! The head sets himself against his body and the body against her head, husband and wife war together. In the Garden You put enmity between the devil and Christ in order to give us peace and salvation (Gen 3:15), and we have taken that enmity for ourselves and scorned Your goodness. Save us, O God! For the waters have come up to our neck (Ps. 69:1), drawing a battle line between head and body. Let us not lose heart at our disfiguration: turn our eyes toward Your Son. Heal us by His blood, forgive our sins, and knit us back together. Take away all opportunity from Satan and speak to us the peace that Jesus has made by the blood of his cross (Col. 1:20). As we stumble in our earthly marriage, support us lest we slip in our heavenly marriage and fall away from Christ. Keep us faithful in attending Your Service and take away all excuses that would prevent us from hearing Your Gospel and receiving Your Son's body and blood. As we stand before Your altar on earth, united in Your Son, so grant us both to stand before Your throne on the Last Day; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Do: Go to church together on Sunday.

Day 9

Reconciliation: Said and Done

o Satan is trying to disembody the head and decapitate the body and ultimately sever you both from Christ. The way he does this is through sin. Sin is like a wedge, as you remember from Genesis 3. It creates division, separating you from one another. This separation causes there to be sides – “my side” and “your side” – and each side will always think it’s in the right and the other is in the wrong, and will voice it loudly. This is called *blame*, and is another consequence that you remember from man’s fall.

You know how this goes. The wife walks into the house with an armful of groceries and sees a sink full of dishes. “Why didn’t you do the dishes?” she inquires of her husband, in a tone that would make a cat’s hair stand on end. The husband, unaware that he’s done anything wrong but keenly aware of the fact that his next step may well be on the pressure plate of a land-mine, replies, “Why were you expecting me to do the dishes?” With incredible incredulity the wife bursts, “I asked you to do the dishes right before I walked out the door an hour ago.” “No you didn’t,” the husband responds, knowing full well his wife’s version of prior events is likely more accurate than his, but desiring to cover his rear. “Yes, I did,” the wife insists, “You even said, ‘Uh-huh’ when you were watching TV.” “Well I don’t remember that,” the husband replies with great sincerity; a very true statement that probably says more about how his brain functions while staring at a screen than it does about the wife’s request. “This is just like you,” she says, launching into recollections of the past with more attention to detail than the world’s foremost historians, “It’s like talking to a wall. You never do anything around here.” His good name having been slandered by his own bride, the gloves come off and the husband retorts, “Oh, really? I cooked you supper last night. I cleaned the bathroom on Tuesday. I mow the lawn. And do you ever thank me for any of it? No. You just whine and make sweeping statements about how useless I am.” “Is that how it’s going to be?” the wife continues, not having heard anything except her husband’s demand for recognition, “You want me to pat you on the back every time you do something? What about me? You never tell me thank you!” Seeking to clarify these muddy waters the husband redirects, “That’s not the point. The point is I do plenty around here.”

“Well good for you,” the wife makes ready to pound the final nail in the coffin of this argument: “but you still didn’t do the dishes!”

And there you stand, body against head, head against body. What to do? The answer is: reconcile. You know how to do it already because you do it every Sunday. You appear before Christ, you confess your sins, he forgives them by his holy, precious blood, and so the wedge of sin is removed and head and body are reconciled. How do you do this between yourselves as husband and wife? Confess your sins to one another and forgive each other’s sins. To pick up the previous conversation, it might sound like this. Husband: “I’m sorry I didn’t do the dishes and I’m sorry I spoke harshly with you. I have sinned against you.” Wife: “I forgive your sin. I’m sorry I was disrespectful toward you. I sinned against you too.” Husband: “I forgive your sin.” And that’s it! Reconciliation has happened!

“What? How could it happen so quickly and easily, with mere words? How can people forgive sins? And the dishes still aren’t done! How can everything be well again?” Let’s answer these questions in turn. “How could it happen so quickly and easily?” The truth is, getting the forgiveness of sins was neither quick nor easy. It required God taking on human flesh and coming into a sinful world. Jesus spent years taking the gruesome consequences of our sins – and our sins themselves – into his body. Jesus suffered for our sins: being flogged, beaten, mocked, spit on, stripped, crucified, and murdered. He hung on the cross under God’s wrath. So again, getting the forgiveness of sins was neither quick nor easy.

However, applying the forgiveness of sins is both quick and easy. In Matthew 9 Jesus says to a paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” Said. Done. Jesus speaks, it is so. But there were objectors wondering how by a mere word he could forgive sins. To prove the power of his Word Jesus then says to the paralytic, “Rise, pick up your bed and go home.” And the paralytic walked! Jesus’ Word does what it says, and by healing a paralytic with a word he showed that he can forgive sins with a word.

“But how can mere men forgive sins?” Because Jesus has given to his Church to do so. Interestingly, after the paralytic walks the crowds “glorified God, who had given such authority to men.” So Jesus says to his disciples in Matthew 18:18, “Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Earthly marriage gives a lovely picture of this. Just as man and woman get married and then share the same joys

to the same home, so Jesus married his Church and gave her the keys of the kingdom. She can forgive sins.

“But the dishes still aren’t done! How can everything be well again?” If reconciliation of husband and wife depended on one of them doing something, then the forgiveness of sins would no longer be by the grace of Christ, but by the works of men, which is like trying to pay a debt with an empty wallet. But Jesus has given the riches of his body and blood to cover his Church’s debts. You aren’t working with your funds but with his. Christ and the Church have a joint bank account, and we must understand that Jesus has put in every penny and his Church has contributed nothing. So when the wife says to her husband, “I forgive your sin,” what this means is, “We’re both sinners and have nothing of ourselves to fix this. There’s nothing you nor I could do. But Jesus has given us everything that is his. So I forgive your sin, not by virtue of myself, but because as a member of Christ’s body, the Church, I have access to his forgiving blood.” And the husband is likewise a member of the Church, with access to the same blood to use for his wife.

“I have sinned against you.” “I forgive your sin.” Reconciliation really is that easy, because Jesus has *made* it easy for the sake of his bride. Said. Done.



Talk: Husband, say, “I have sinned against you” to your wife. Wife, say, “I forgive your sin” to your husband. Do this five times. Then switch. Wife, you say, “I have sinned against you.” Husband, you say, “I forgive your sin.” Do this five times. This is to familiarize yourselves with the language of reconciliation. After this little exercise discuss this question: Which is harder for you to say, and why?

Pray: Lord God, we deserve to perish miserably in our sins and be carried down to the depths with a millstone around our neck. Yet in Your great mercy you have drawn us up from the depths and set our feet upon the Rock of Your Son. In Him You were pleased to gain for us the forgiveness of sins. That forgiveness came at great price – let us never underestimate its worth. But while getting forgiveness was costly, you apply it to us and give it to us with simple words that are easily spoken. You have taken the hard labor and given us the fruits. Indeed, Your Son’s yoke is easy and His burden is light (Mt. 11:30). Do not allow us to forsake so great a gift, nor let Your holy Absolution go

unspoken among us. When we sin against each other, reveal our sins to us quickly by the conviction of Your Holy Spirit, spur us on to confess our sins to each other, grant us grace to speak the Absolution when sinned against, and give us faith to believe the truth of the Absolution when it is spoken to us. Make Your Son's voice heard in our home pronouncing the forgiveness of sins. Take away all doubt that would keep us from receiving Your forgiveness. At the creation of the world you spoke and it was so. Give us confidence that Your Word continues to do what it says. Remove every wedge of sin so that we would not be outwitted by Satan (2 Cor. 2:11), and pour Your love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), that in the midst of sin we would hope in our Savior, Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Do: As you sin against each other see how quickly you can move from blame to reconciliation. Use the phrases you learned and practiced.

Day 10

Reconciliation: Quick-Start Guide, part 1



ou know what reconciliation is and generally how to go about it. But like the eighteen speed blender that you put on your wedding registry with the twenty-seven attachments, it helps to have a quick-start guide. In the midst of sinful separation and blame, remember these points:

1

"I'm the worse sinner"

Jesus says in Matthew 7 (the Sermon on the Mount), "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is a log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:3-5). Now to whom does Jesus speak these words? Who is the "you"? Is it the person who's the worse sinner? Yes, but understand that when Jesus says "you" he means you!

Looking back to the situation with the dishes, who committed the worse sin? The husband is inclined to say, "She did," and the wife, "He did." But Jesus says, "You did," so according to his Word both husband and wife must say, "I did." Believe what Jesus says: the log is in your eye. The other has but a speck. Believing this word of Jesus leads to proper humility and fosters reconciliation.

2

*"The one who is right does not win the fight,
but the one who confesses first."*

"Winning" an argument implies that one side has prevailed over the other, and when that happens in marriage it only solidifies division between head and body. After all, how can one flesh win against itself? The evidence that an argument has been won is not that the one in the right has been identified, it's that unity prevails. An argument is won when husband and wife speak the forgiving words of Christ to each other, which alone restore peace and harmony. Thus a husband or wife

either win together or lose together, but if one pridefully insists on being “right,” they both lose.

Either husband or wife can confess first, whichever first realizes that the log is in his or her own eye. But since you, husband, are an image of Christ in your marriage, consider these words from Colossians 1:21-22: “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he [Jesus] has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death.” Ah, we’re back to you loving your wife by giving yourself up for her: taking the hit, identifying yourself as the sinner even if she’s still hostile in mind toward you, suffering humiliation as Christ suffered at our hands to save us. So husband, you have an obligation as husband to seek reconciliation long before your wife has even thought of it (like Christ), and as a sinful human being (unlike Christ) that means you identify the log in your eye as quickly as possible and confess your sin first. If your wife confesses first then you really ought to be ashamed of yourself.

3

Confess specifically.

The worst apology in the world is the vague one, and I use the word “apology” instead of “confession” because the vague apologizer doesn’t wish to be identified as a sinner, but simply be done with the argument. Consider again the previous conversation about the dishes. The wife concludes, “You still didn’t do the dishes!” Now what if the husband said, “Fine, you know what? I’m sorry,” and then stormed off? You see that he didn’t want to reconcile, but simply wanted to be done arguing. The vague apology is no confession, and only leads to more strife, separation, and blame.

What’s the alternative? *Confess specifically.* Specify exactly what sin or sins you have committed. And how do you know what to call “sin”? You learn from God’s Word. Martin Luther included a very useful section in the Small Catechism called the “Table of Duties.” He subtitled it, “certain passages of Scripture for various holy orders and positions, admonishing them about their duties and responsibilities.” Among these “holy orders” is a section “to Husbands,” followed by “to Wives.” Under Husbands Luther quotes 1 Peter 3:7 and Colossians 3:19. Duties included here are “live with your wives in an understanding way,” “show honor to the woman as the weaker vessel,” “love your wives,” and “do not be harsh with them.” When you sin against your wife, these are the sins you commit. Looking back at the

confession of the husband, he confessed that he did not do the dishes (doing so would have been loving his wife) and that he spoke harshly with his wife. Both of these sins are found in the Table of Duties.

Under Wives, Luther quotes Ephesians 5:22 and 1 Peter 3:5-6. Duties included here are “submit to your husbands,” “do good,” and “do not fear anything that is frightening.” When you sin against your husband these are the sins you commit. So the wife confessed that she was disrespectful (insubordinate). In the midst of your conflicts as husband and wife, consider these duties, how you failed to do them, and then confess specifically.

4

No but.

After confessing your sin, do not try to explain or justify yourself. That’s not how Christ’s forgiveness works. He justifies you by taking your sin in his body and killing it on the cross, not by explaining it away. So lay it out, and then say, “I have sinned against you.” It’s a wonderfully Scriptural phrase, used by such people as David (2 Samuel 12:13, Psalm 51:4) and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:21). The practical usefulness of this phrase is that it replaces the “but” and puts a stopper on your tongue before your tongue starts trying to justify you. “I have sinned against you” has a sense of finality to it and anticipates a response, to which we will turn in the next lesson.



Talk: How do you usually end arguments and conflicts? Which of these four points do each of you find the hardest to practice? Which one do you think will help you best as a couple?

Pray: Lord Jesus, we were once alienated from You and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, but now You have reconciled us in Your body of flesh by Your death (Col. 1:21-22). Through You God has made peace by the blood of Your cross (Col. 1:20). Great is Your name, for you desire peace instead of revenge. You would rather suffer as the one who has done wrong in order to reconcile us than show Yourself to be in the right and continue the strife. We lament our sinful flesh that desires revenge and desires to justify itself. Forgive our anger and grudges toward each other and tear out every root of bitterness that would

spring up and cause us trouble and defile us (Heb. 12:15). Make us to be like You, that having received Your grace we would live in it toward one another. Make us sober-minded and humble with regard to our own sins, that we would not become puffed up with pride or self-righteousness. Like the Apostle Paul make us see ourselves as the foremost among sinners (1 Tim. 1:15) that we might receive mercy through You. Increase in us knowledge of Your Word and of our duties toward one another, that we would know Your Father's will for us and at the same time recognize exactly where we have gone wrong when we sin. Most of all, remove all thoughts and attempts at self-justification that would cause us to misplace our faith by trusting in ourselves. You alone are our righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30), and so we pray appealing to Your merits and not our own. Amen.

Do: Husband, learn 1 Peter 3:7 and Colossians 3:19 by heart. Wife, the same for Ephesians 5:22 and 1 Peter 3:5-6.

Day 11

Reconciliation: Quick-Start Guide, part 2



e've covered some practical tips for fostering reconciliation and confessing your sins. We now turn to practical tips for forgiving sins and what should follow forgiveness. The numbering continues from the previous lesson.

5

Confession Absolution, and nothing in between.

We now take up how to be a good confessor, that is, someone who hears another's confession. Wife, your husband has just confessed his sin. He concluded, "I have sinned against you," and with downcast face glances up to hear what you will say. Here's what you want to say: "About time you realized it! I'm glad you're finally seeing things my way!" And you want to say that because your sinful flesh still wants there to be separation and blame, and especially now that there's been a confession your sinful flesh perks up at the thought that it's in the right. You must remember: that sinful pride is not according to Jesus' words from Matthew 7, you're the one with the log in your eye. Unwillingness to forgive comes from an unwillingness to recognize yourself as a sinner, which in turn denies your need for Christ.

So in Matthew 6 Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer, and of the seven things we ask for in that prayer, which does he immediately explain? The fifth petition: "and forgive us our debts, as also have forgiven our debtors." And how does he explain it? "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15). Jesus also tells the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18, which has the same point. A servant had his billion dollar debt forgiven, then the same servant went out and demanded that his fellow servant pay back a ten-thousand dollar debt. "Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all the debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (Matthew 18:32-35).

You were the debtor and Jesus Christ the bridegroom paid off your billion dollar debt for you with his very life to redeem his bride. When a member of his Church refuses to forgive, then that member has forgotten and cast aside the grace of Christ. In other words, unforgiveness is a symptom of unbelief, and unbelief damns (Mark 16:16). If you're struggling to forgive, call to mind the payment that Jesus made to redeem you. Fix your thoughts on Christ crucified, and remember first, "he hangs there because of me, taking the punishment I deserve" and second, "he hangs there for me, to save me from my sins." Your debts far outweigh whatever your husband has just done, and Christ has removed them all far from you, as far as the east is from the west. What's a sink full of dishes compared to that?

So what do you say after the other confesses to you? You call to mind the grace of Jesus toward you and you say, "I forgive your sin." And that's it. The sin has been forgiven. If the other was first to confess and you have forgiven the sin, the next words out of your mouth should be your confession. There may be times when one has sinned and the other has not, but this case is more rare than a wedding day with no problems. When "I forgive your sin" has been spoken by both, reconciliation has happened. The wedge of sin is gone, unity has been preserved, separation and blame have ceased, and consciences have been comforted by Christ. Now what flows from this?

6

Said. Done.

Since the forgiveness that husband and wife exercise toward one another is in truth the forgiveness of Jesus himself, then we treat forgiveness the same way Christ does. The Lord says in Jeremiah 31:34, "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Now this isn't the familiar phrase "forgive and forget." There are some sins you'll never forget, so not only is that phrase not in Scripture, it's also impossible. Rather, the word "remember" in Hebrew means to "call to remembrance" for the purpose of acting on it. So in Genesis 8 when Noah and seven others and a bunch of animals are in the ark bobbing around it says, "But God remembered Noah." This does not mean that God said, "Oh yeah! That's right! Even though the ark is the only visible thing on the face of the planet I had completely forgotten about it!" No, it means that God called Noah to mind in order to do something about him.

When the Lord says, “I will remember their sin no more” he’s saying, “I will not bring this sin up ever again or act against you because of it.” What does this mean for the forgiveness you apply to one another as husband and wife? That you have the same attitude and practice as Jesus does when it comes to forgiveness. Once you say, “I forgive your sin,” then that sin is gone, dead, and buried forever. You don’t bring it up with family or friends. You don’t save it as ammunition in a future fight. You don’t harbor bitterness or hold a grudge. You may not forget the sin, but you do not call it to remembrance – neither bringing it up with mind or mouth, nor acting against the other because of it.

Is this difficult? Yes. If you’re struggling and are calling a sin to remembrance, confess that to the other, receive forgiveness, and keep fighting the urge of the sinful flesh. And, as always in marriage, the best cure is Jesus himself. Attend his Service, receive forgiveness from him, and as he forgives he will shape how you forgive. Hope is again and always found in the true bridegroom, who alone can practice forgiveness perfectly, and of whom your marriage is a reflection, forever dependent on the reality.



Talk: How has practicing reconciliation affected your arguments and conflicts? What changes or differences have you noticed?

Pray: Jesus, our King and Master, we owed You such debt that if we heaped up the price of our lives along with all we have and offered it before You, it would have been as nothing in Your sight. Like removing a drop from the ocean, such is the futility of our works for canceling our debts, and we cannot do even that little bit. But out of compassion for us in our helpless state You forgave the debt for us, blotting it out with Your priceless blood (Mt. 18:23-27). As we interact with our fellow-servants, especially with each other, keep us always mindful of what You have done for us. What small sums are owed to us compared to what we owed to You! We are ashamed to say that our hands are ready to choke and our tongues to demand because of the little debts that others owe us (Mt. 18:28). Spare us from the hellish jailers, we beg of You (Mt. 18:34). We know full well what we deserve, but Lord, have mercy. Exercise the same compassion You showed when you settled accounts on the cross, and do not deal with us according to our sins (Ps 103:10). Being thus assured of Your mercy and grace, make us slow to

anger and eager to forgive. When sins are confessed to us, put Your Word of Absolution on the tips of our tongues. Bury the confession of sins deep in our ears that we would never bring it to remembrance, just as You remember our sins no more (Jer. 31:34). Our balanced accounts are in Your nail-pierced hands. Grant that we never forget Your compassion and mercy. Amen.

Do: Never go to bed with conflict between the two of you. The brief Confession and Absolution from the Compline service on page 254 of *Lutheran Service Book* is a great way to clear the air before turning out the lights. If it's just the two of you, leave out the "brothers and sisters line." Use this tonight before going to bed. Follow the lefthand column on page 254 of the hymnal, or simply turn to *Appendix A* in this devotional, page 117.

Day 12

Restore and Prevent



hink back to the conversation about the dishes. If that husband and wife have practiced reconciliation, then where do things stand? They've confessed their sins to each other, they've forgiven the sins of the other; in short, they're reconciled. But what will happen if they simply drop the matter at this point? To put it bluntly, the forgiveness of sins doesn't do the same thing as a bottle of Dawn and a washcloth. The dishes still aren't done and they run the risk of the same thing happening again. Thus there are two things that flow from reconciliation: restoration and prevention.

1

Restoration.

Man is reconciled with God when his sins are forgiven freely for the sake of Christ. He does nothing to earn it or deserve it, just as the Church didn't cleanse herself or sanctify herself but received it all freely from Christ as he selflessly loved her. But when we are reconciled with God and one another, that reconciliation gives us the desire to put things back to how they were before we sinned. This is what's called restoration. Let me be perfectly clear: restoration does not earn reconciliation, but naturally flows from it.

So, for instance, in Luke 19 Jesus is passing through Jericho and there's a man there named Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector, and was rich because he defrauded people on a regular basis. He had a reputation in town of being a "sinner." Zacchaeus was alienated from God by his sin. He was the sort of person you wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole. And yet what happened? Jesus came to the place where Zacchaeus was in a sycamore tree, looked right up at him, and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." Jesus went to Zacchaeus, like husband to bride, and reconciled him to himself. Now this reconciliation happened quite apart from Zacchaeus doing anything to deserve it. The reconciliation was Jesus' doing. But flowing from that free forgiveness of sins Zacchaeus seeks to restore what he has defrauded: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." Reconciliation begets restoration.

Returning to the husband and wife and their sink full of dishes, after they're reconciled the husband has the desire to do the dishes. It's something his wife asked him to do, something he said he would do, and now he actually wants to do it. Now there are instances where restoration is impractical or impossible. If you're hurling insults at each other as husband and wife, sitting down after you've reconciled and making up compliments about each other is going to feel forced. Restoration in that case may simply mean being more conscious of how you're using words with one another as time goes on, building up instead of tearing down. And this leads to the second thing that flows from reconciliation:

2

Prevention.

After you've reconciled, the holy and spotless bride of Christ has the upper hand over her sinful flesh and is in a wonderful position to plot against it. Continuing with our example, after the husband does the dishes he can sit down with his wife and discuss, "What can we do to keep this from happening again in the future?" The question here isn't ultimately about how to avoid dishes piling up, but how to keep each other from sin.

The husband knows, "When my wife asks me to do something, and I say I will and then don't, that makes me unreliable in her eyes and – even worse! – presents Christ as someone who doesn't keep his promises. She naturally enough responds with anger and rages against God's good order that, in her eyes, has placed her under the authority of a lazy nincompoop. How can I avoid tempting her to despise God's good order, and how can I avoid committing the same sin in the future?" Perhaps they'll agree that requests of the other should be accompanied with eye contact and be free from distractions. Maybe she'll wait until a commercial break to ask him to do something and he'll look at her when she's talking to him. Perhaps they'll employ affirmative responses, something in plain English like, "Yes, dear," instead of comatose grunts. Whatever they come up with, the goal is to prevent sin and temptation to sin.

Now it must be noted that both restoration and prevention have their limits. Zacchaeus could restore fourfold what he had defrauded, but he couldn't take away or replace the months or years of scraping by that he had brought on those whose money he had taken. The husband can do everything that his wife requests of him from that day forward,

but the devil will find some other way to tempt the husband to neglect love and the wife to be insubordinate. And so you see that there will be a continued need for reconciliation, and that reconciliation is the only perfect part of this process. Reconciliation is the only perfect part because it depends entirely on Jesus. As soon as we get our hands or thoughts involved we botch it.

But even this works to your advantage as husband and wife, because you're constantly being turned from your efforts and abilities to the grace of Jesus. Restoration and prevention may fail, but Jesus' reconciliation does not. Let your hope rest on what he has done, and it will not only lead to a good marriage, but also to eternal salvation.



Talk: Wife, which sins do you struggle with the most and which are you most easily tempted to commit? Husband, what can you do to help your wife avoid or withstand these temptations? Husband, which sins do you struggle with most and which are you most easily tempted to commit? Wife, what can you do to help your husband avoid or withstand these temptations?

Pray: Heavenly Father, in Your Son You have given us the forgiveness of sins by making Him to be sin who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). More than this, in Him You restored what we had lost through our transgressions: You reopened the door to Your paradise and have given us fruit from the life-giving tree of His cross. And as if this were not enough, You have safeguarded us in this earthly life by giving us Your Holy Spirit to war against the flesh. Indeed, You do all things well, and we offer You thanksgiving for Your salvation and everything You have given us along with it. Give us the same desire not only to reconcile but also to restore what has been lost and prevent future sin. Protect us from mixing these fruits of reconciliation with reconciliation itself, that the free forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus would not be mingled with human works. Yet by that full reconciliation in Christ, give us the willing heart of Zacchaeus that seeks to undo what it has done wrong (Lk. 19:8). And when we are tempted in the future, do not let us be tempted beyond our ability but provide a way of escape that we may be able to endure it (1 Cor. 10:13). Give us Your full armor, that we would be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm (Eph. 6:13). Make us a help to one another in fighting temptation. But

most of all, prevent us from trusting in our own abilities and instead anchor us firmly on the solid foundation of Christ alone. Do all of this for His sake. Amen.

Do: Continue practicing reconciliation. Consider afterward what needs to be restored and what you can do to restore it. Consider also what you can do to prevent similar sins in the future.

Day 13

Penance



enance is a rather unfortunate practice that at all times seeks to infiltrate the Church. The way it works is this: “I confess that I have sinned against God in thought, word, and deed, by what I have done and by what I have left undone.” “I forgive your sin for the sake of Christ... as long as you pray the Lord’s Prayer ten times and eat only bread and water for supper and put an extra twenty in the offering plate.” So you see, this is no longer Confession and Absolution, but Confession and pseudo-Restoration: that is, Confession and *Bribery*. Jesus’ work has been replaced by more of our work.

Sometimes this practice has been more formally instituted, sometimes it lurks assumed just below the surface, like a five-tier wedding cake whose top three tiers have styrofoam under the fondant. But no matter the time or the place the Church struggles against her sinful flesh, which tells her, “You have to *do* something in order to receive the forgiveness of sins.” And because your marriage is a reflection of Christ and his Church, this practice will try to infiltrate that as well.

Sometimes it’s really obvious: Husband, “I’m sorry I didn’t do the dishes.” Wife, “Well get them done and then we’ll talk.” Sometimes it’s more subtle: “I’m sorry I didn’t do the dishes.” “I forgive your sin, just get them done.” Whether it’s obvious or subtle, in both cases the forgiveness of sins has been made to depend on the works of a sinful human being instead of the sinless Son of God.

Now this problem is fairly easy to avoid: keep things in the right order: Confession followed immediately by Absolution (nothing in between), then just let restoration happen as it naturally flows from reconciliation. The harder situation to avoid is when you simply start doing penance instead of confessing your sin to the other. Returning to the husband and wife and their dishes, say instead of confessing his sin the husband ends the argument by going to the sink and doing the dishes. And then does the laundry. And washes his wife’s car. And cooks her supper. Now what’s behind all of this? Is the husband giving himself up for his wife and loving her? Under other circumstances these actions could be acts of love toward his wife. But not under these circumstances. The husband isn’t trying to love his wife, but butter her

up. Or to put it even more truly and even worse: he's trying to work off his sin.

There will be one of two outcomes: either he will convince himself that he has worked off his sin, like the Pharisees did in Jesus' day – he'll be convinced he's done enough – or he will fall into hopeless despair like Judas did when he went out and hung himself – he'll keep doing more and more to work it off but will realize he can't. Either way his sin is still not forgiven, and in fact he has committed a much worse one: he has tried to present *himself* without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, which completely buries Christ.

There are two lessons to learn from this. First, and most obviously, if you sin against the other don't do penance. Instead, confess your sin and hear Jesus forgive your sin. Second, and perhaps requiring more explanation: get rid of the dog house. "The dog house" is a term that's mostly been used to refer to a wife being irritated with her husband for a prolonged period of time because of something he's done. But more broadly, being in the dog house means the other requires some sort of penance from you – some good work or works – to earn your way back into good graces. Many a husband or wife has spent the night on the couch because of such nonsense. Often the reason that husband or wife do penance instead of confessing and reconciling is that the other perpetuates the idea of the dog house, which is to perpetuate the idea that we can atone for our own sins. Not only is this incredibly unhealthy for a marriage, it is also blasphemy against Jesus. He alone can forgive sins; what are you saying about him if you accept your husband's or wife's works as payment instead?

In short, don't do penance, and don't accept penance. Have your sins forgiven freely for the sake of Christ, and forgive sins freely for the sake of Christ, just as he has made payment for your sins apart from your works. In this way your marriage will be an excellent picture of Christ and his Church: he sanctifies her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, 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.



Talk: What is the difference between penance and reconciliation? Why do we naturally gravitate toward penance (either doing it ourselves or

requiring it of others)? How does the practice of penance in a marriage blaspheme Christ?

Pray: Lord God, we are beggars before Your throne who ask alms from You trusting in Your mercy and not our merits. Even our righteous deeds are polluted and unclean (Is. 64:6). What then of our many unrighteous deeds? Our works are like a splintered reed before You: if we lean on them we pierce our hands and in the end fall to the ground. Do not watch us fall, but support us by the stout cross of Your Son. We give You thanks for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for our sake He became poor, so that we by His poverty might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). Having thus been showered with heavenly riches, keep us from returning to the spiritual poverty of our works. Satisfy us who hunger and thirst for righteousness with the righteousness of Your Son (Mt. 5:6). Stop our mouths if we begin to offer up our works as payment before one another or before You. Assure us of our richness in Christ so that without fear of judgment we can confess our personal poverty. Prevent us also from accepting human works as atonement for sin. Hallow Your name among us by making Jesus the only rich man whose works are acceptable as payment for sin. Continually turn us from trusting what we have done and cause us to trust what he has done, that we would be upheld in all earthly trials and temptations and on the Day of His coming; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Do: Learn Isaiah 64:6 by heart: “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.” When you’re tempted to do penance recite this verse and remember that your *righteous* deeds are like a polluted garment: even the “good” you do earns you nothing. To drive home the point further: the Hebrew word that gets translated as “polluted garment” literally means “used menstrual cloth.” “Here Jesus, here’s this used menstrual cloth. So we’re good now, right?” In the terms of Isaiah 64:6, penance sounds utterly ridiculous. So learn this verse by heart and recall it as often as you need it. It will leave you empty-handed and drive you to seek the salvation that comes by grace, through faith, apart from works, for the sake of Christ alone.

Day 14

Provoke One Another



At this point you have dealt with the sinful flesh and its sins, learned to reconcile, restore, and prevent. Yet marriage would seem to be a miserable estate if all it meant was constant temptation and dealing with sin. Don't forget that marriage is a gift of God, meant to make "very good" that which was "not good." In the next several lessons we turn to the great benefits of marriage.

Before expanding on the benefits themselves, the first thing to know about the benefits of marriage is that you receive them through the other – husband through wife, wife through husband. Now which should be the greater concern: that you receive and enjoy the benefits of marriage, or that the other receive and enjoy the benefits of marriage? There are two factors that contribute toward the answer.

First is the command of God, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18, quoted by Jesus in Matthew 22:39). This means that whatever good you would seek for yourself, you seek for others. "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor" (1 Corinthians 10:24). So why seek benefits for the other? Because God said so.

But as usual God doesn't leave us with a naked command. Second, you see from Christ and his Church that when Christ seeks the good of his bride, she subordinates herself to him gladly and willingly. Jesus wasn't seeking subordination from the Church; he was seeking salvation for the Church. But by him doing his duty he provoked her to do hers. A very wise pastor named John Chrysostom once preached on Ephesians 5, "Do you desire your wife to listen to you, as the Church to Christ? You keep providing for her, as Christ for the Church." And later in the sermon, " 'What then,' he says, 'if my wife doesn't revere me?' You love; continue to fulfill your own duty. For even if the things due from others do not follow, it is necessary that our duties do follow... In any case, let the wife, even if she is not loved, nevertheless show reverence, in order that there be nothing lacking with her. Also the husband: should the wife not show reverence, let him love anyway, in order that he lack nothing. For each one has received his own duty."

When the husband does his duty it provokes the wife to do hers. He loves, whether she's subordinating herself or not, and this calls forth

her subordination. The wife subordinates herself, whether the husband is loving or not, and this provokes his love. All this to say, if you want to enjoy your marriage then concern yourself with your duty. Husband, seek to benefit your wife by loving her. In so doing you'll call forth her subordination and reverence (even though that wasn't your reason for loving her). Wife, seek to benefit your husband by subordinating yourself to him. In so doing you'll call forth his love (even though that wasn't your reason for subordinating yourself to him).

Now isn't this how Christ's kingdom works? Victory through suffering, exaltation by humility, life from death. Hence you don't get to enjoy the benefits of marriage by being selfish and demanding them. That's an excellent way to have a miserable marriage. Instead you enjoy the benefits of marriage when you aren't at all interested in them and instead selflessly do your duty for the other.

This is truly to provoke one another, not in the sense of picking a fight, but in the sense of calling forth good from the other. So it says in Hebrews 10:24, "Let us give thought to one another in order to provoke to love and good works." The Greek word for provoke means "irritate." You can think of an itch. When you pick a fight you make the other person itch in a way they can't help but scratch – retaliating, yelling, etc. – and it always ends badly for both of you. But it works the same way for the good: by doing your duty in marriage you make the other person itch. And the way the other scratches that itch is by doing their duty in return. It can't be helped! You have the satisfaction of knowing you've done your duty, and you get to enjoy the benefits of marriage because you've provoked them from the other. Therefore you must never ask, "Why isn't my wife doing her duty?" or vice versa. Instead simply ask, "How can I better do my duty?" and the rest will take care of itself.

As should be expected, you get this selflessness by receiving the selfless love of Christ. The sinful flesh is completely turned in on itself and will only ever seek its own good without regard for another. Christ broke this way of thinking by selflessly giving of himself for his Church, suffering in her place, humbly doing his duty and not condemning her for forsaking hers. If you're struggling with selfishness and have a hard time being selfless, then hear the Gospel, receive the body and blood of Christ selflessly shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins, and his love will provoke your love.

In the next lessons we'll unpack the duties of husband, and in so doing, you, wife, will see the benefits that God gives you through your husband. Then we'll unpack the duties of wife, and you, husband, will see the benefits that God gives you through your wife.



Talk: What are the two reasons why you should be more concerned about doing your own duty than demanding duties from your spouse? How do you properly provoke one another in marriage?

Pray: O God, you have commanded us to do our wifely duty toward Your Son, our Bridegroom, willingly subordinating ourselves to Him at all times and in all things. But more than driving us to do our duties by Your command, You have also enticed us toward our duties by Your Son. Even though we weren't doing our duty as we ought, You sent Jesus to do His. He loved us by giving Himself up for us (Eph. 5:25), not demanding our submission but concerning Himself with what He had been given to do. As recipients of such love, our duties practically do themselves! We have been filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18) who calls forth our willing subordination in response to the love of our Bridegroom. Grant that we live similarly in our earthly marriage. Give us strength to do our duties toward each other. Forgive our selfishness that drives us to make demands and claim entitlement instead of simply doing what we've been given to do. Like Your Son, grant that we approach each other not to be served but to serve (Mt. 20:28). Provoke us to love and good works by means of the other (Heb. 10:24). And in all of this show us the benefits of marriage that You offer through husband to wife and through wife to husband, that we would reflect Christ and His Church here, and behold the reality in full hereafter. Amen.

Do: Do your duty in your marriage: husband, love your wife by giving yourself up for her; wife, willingly subordinate yourself to your husband. Then watch how the other responds to you doing your duty.

Day 15

How to Love Your Wife, part 1



usband, here you will see an explanation of your duties toward your wife, and wife, you will see what great and glorious things Christ gives you through your husband. Now, husband, you already know that your chief duty toward your wife is to love her “as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (because in your marriage you’re an image of Christ) and “as your own body” (because woman was taken from man). But what does this love look like?

1

Make her holy with the Word of God.

In Ephesians 5 Jesus is shown as doing all things to sanctify his bride (that is, to make her holy), to present her as “holy and without blemish.” Now Jesus can do this of himself; you, husband, do it with Jesus’ holy Word. So you make sure that you take your wife to church every Sunday, rather than her pestering you. Read Scripture to your wife, pray for her and with her. Govern your whole life together according to the Word of God. This will give your wife great assurance of your love, and here’s why: it’s a daunting thing to subordinate yourself to someone who pretends to have unbridled, raw power; it’s something else entirely to subordinate yourself to someone who acknowledges his own subordination to a higher authority. When you bend the knee to God’s Word it shows your wife that whatever authority you exercise is not yours. Rather it is the authority of a perfect and completely loving God.

Subordinating yourself to Christ’s Word will mean giving up your pride, but it will also mean good things for you and your wife, and will make your authority much more attractive to her. The husband’s great honor and responsibility is seeing to the salvation of his household. He does this not by marching to the beat of his own drum, but by bringing all things into the rhythm of God’s Word. When a higher and perfect authority sets the rhythm in your house then all things go well and your wife has added comfort and security, which are of great value to her. John Chrysostom puts it well in his 20th Homily on Ephesians, “For if you furnish her holy and without blemish, all things will follow. Seek

continually the things of God, and the things of man will follow with much blessing.”

2

Hold fast to her.

Husband, you remember the verse from Genesis 2:24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” That verb “hold fast” is included among your duties as husband. In many other places in Scripture, especially in Deuteronomy, this word is used to refer to the exclusive faithfulness of God’s people toward him. “You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise. He is your God” (Deuteronomy 10:20-21). The opposite of holding fast is abandoning. “And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods” (Judges 2:12).

So in your wedding vows you said you would “forsaking all others, remain united to her alone, as long as you both shall live.” Forsake all others, hold fast to her alone. You show your wife that you hold her fast both by doing certain things and by avoiding certain things. What follows are not laws from God’s Word, but suggestions. You may well come up with better ways to hold fast to your wife. Take the ones that begin “never” more seriously.

Do: Show her that you’d rather spend time with her than with anyone else in the world, that you value her company, that she has your undivided attention when you speak together. Drop what you’re doing and look into her eyes the second she opens her mouth to talk to you. Continue to look at her when she speaks. Drop what you’re doing at random and walk over and give her a hug and tell her you love her. Say, “I’m yours,” and make sure not to make it dependent on some quality in her that she may someday lack. She’s the only one for you because she’s the one God gave you in marriage – your exclusive faithfulness toward her doesn’t depend on her but on God’s Word. Forsake other things in order to be with her. If she expresses uncertainty about your faithfulness because of some sin she’s committed tell her, “Sorry, you’re stuck with me.” Avert your eyes if there’s a tempting image of another woman on TV or on display in public.

Don’t: Never compare your wife with another woman, either in a good way or a bad way. Even if you were to say, “I’m glad you’re not like that woman,” this would show that you have eyes for others. Avoid

complimenting another woman on her appearance or character, especially in the presence of your wife. Never cancel plans with your wife in order to be with someone else. Never speak ill of your wife to other people; even if she never were to hear of it you'd be saying that the Lord has given you a shabby gift, and the Lord doesn't give shabby gifts. Never do anything to imply that your commitment to your wife depends on her physical appearance. Never multitask when your wife is talking to you – you know you can't hear her when you're doing something else. Never give your wife the impression that she must share you.

These are a few suggestions that are broadly applicable and there are certainly many more. But if you really want to show your wife she's the only one for you and you are hers alone then ask her, "What are some ways that I can show you my faithfulness toward you?" or "What can I do to show you that I belong to you alone?" Then look at her when she answers. To be continued...



Talk: Husband, ask your wife the questions at the end of today's lesson.

Pray: Jesus Christ, You loved the Church by giving Yourself up for her, that You might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word (Eph. 5:25-26). As You make Your Church holy, so grant all husbands to make their wives holy with Your holy Word. Give husbands and wives delight in Your Word. Make it sweeter than honey to their mouth (Ps. 119:103) and more precious than silver refined seven times (Ps. 12:6). As You left Your Father to come into our fallen world and hold fast to us as Your dear bride (Gen. 2:24), give such steadfastness to all husbands, that forsaking all others they remain united to their own wives. Turn their eyes from all other women and make each wife the apple of her husband's eye (Ps. 17:8). Make us recognize how You do these duties toward us, that as members of Your Church we would benefit greatly from Your love, and that as husband and wife to each other on earth such love would be shown and received among us as well; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

Do: If you don't currently read God's Word together or pray together, talk about when would be the best time during the day to do so, then

start having devotions as husband and wife (if you need advice on getting started, talk to your pastor). If you do have devotions together continue to do so, and discuss: what benefit has it had for your marriage?

Day 16

How to Love Your Wife, part 2



usband, let's continue to digest your duties. We've already covered two of them in detail. We focus now on four others.

3

Nourish and cherish.

It says in Ephesians 5:29, "No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the Church." These words for "nourish" and "cherish" elsewhere refer to the care of children, for instance in Ephesians 6:4 fathers are to "nourish" their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, and in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 Paul speaks of his work in the congregation "like a nursing mother cherishing her own children." These terms make more sense when we think of Christ feeding his tender bride with his own flesh and blood. But a word of caution is necessary here. Husband, your wife has a maternal nature to her, and you can sinfully take advantage of it. If you mope or act needy or down on yourself or helpless, your wife's maternal instincts kick in, and while you may enjoy her nourishing and cherishing you, you've reduced yourself to a child, subordinated yourself to a mother, and left your wife headless. If you have children, let your wife nourish and cherish them; you nourish and cherish her.

How do you do this? Make sure she has daily bread to eat. Make sure she has clothes to wear. Take care of her when she's sick. In short, provide for her as well as you are able. Use a calm and loving tone when you speak to your wife; this promotes a peaceful dwelling. Never yell at your wife. Never hit your wife or exercise any sort of coercive force with her. In all ways present yourself as her guardian, in the sense that "if anything is going to come after you it's going to have to get through me first."

4

Show honor to her as the weaker vessel.

These words are from 1 Peter 3:7. This duty is especially important to keep in mind if your wife is pregnant and there's actually something in the "vessel." Nevertheless, in general there's a certain

fragility about the wife, and that isn't a point against her, but is her glory – like a beautiful crystal sculpture or a masterful oil painting on canvas. People handle these things carefully with white gloves, not to demean them, but quite the opposite: to honor them.

So what are the “white gloves” with which you, husband, show honor to your wife? The rather stereotypical acts of chivalry are actually fine examples of what this looks like: holding the door for her, wrapping your coat around her when it's cold, pulling out her chair to seat her. You behave toward her the way you would behave toward royalty. Teach your wife that chivalry is not chauvinism. You don't do these things as if she couldn't open a door or stand being cold. You do them to honor her, to show that she's special. And so doing just about anything that shows your wife to be special or makes her feel special is a way to fulfill this duty. When you're out in the world together, defend her honor to others. Don't be silent if someone hurts or speaks against your wife. This rarely has to do with people calling your wife bad names or physically harming her, and more often has to do with other people accusing your wife of wrongdoing or slandering her reputation.

The work of Christ himself is the best explanation of this point. When it came to his own name, reputation, and well-being, Jesus turned the other cheek as he taught in Matthew 5:38-39. He would suffer all things, even death, and leave vengeance to God rather than take retaliation into his own hands. But when it came to his bride, the Church, there's a completely different story. The devil was constantly accusing Christ's bride of wrongdoing, calling her a sinner, smearing her name. And even though the charges the devil brought were true, Jesus claimed her sins as his own and crushed the devil's head by his death on the cross. He bore her sins and silenced her accuser. Now this is not encouragement to resort to fisticuffs, but encouragement to defend your wife's reputation (more on this in lesson 22). If someone brings a true charge against her, make it your own sin and your own fault. And whether the charge is true or false, rebuke the one who brought it up, asking who made him God and Lord that he should call others to account for their sins (especially in cases when your wife isn't even present).

5

Do not be bitter.

It is written in Colossians 3:19, “Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.” The word for “be harsh” literally means “be

made bitter," like pouring vinegar into a glass of wine. The way this verse is phrased implies that someone is trying to make you bitter toward your wife. Sometimes it's work, sometimes it's the changes and chances of life, sometimes it's your wife herself. Whatever the case, the devil is happy when instead of a spring of fresh water you spew brackish water at your wife.

Practically speaking, what does this duty require of you? We see the explanation in Christ. He experienced much that would have embittered an ordinary man: despised by those he came to save, suffering for other people's sins, being repaid evil for good. Yet it says in Isaiah 53:7, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth." Peter comments on this verse in 1 Peter 2:23, "When he was reviled he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued giving himself up to him who judges justly."

Husband, don't let suffering on account of others make you bitter, especially not toward your wife. When you suffer unjustly you become a better reflection of Christ, and that is not to be despised. So don't hold grudges, don't speak or act harshly, don't return evil for evil, but like Christ let sin end with you; don't perpetuate it. Speak kindly when your wife is angry, stay calm if she's worked up, be wrong even when you know you're right. It was the glory of Christ to do this for his bride, and he conforms you to himself so you can do this for your bride.

6

Give yourself up.

All of the other duties are various applications of this one: "Husband, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Every duty in some way involved sacrificing yourself, hopping on a cross, for the sake of your bride. Since specifics have been given up to this point, here are some general things to remember: Your discomfort for her comfort. Your humiliation for her exaltation. Your loss for her gain. Your injury for her safety. Your death for her life. Husband for his wife. Christ for his Church.

Conclusion.

Make her holy. Hold her fast. Nourish and cherish her. Honor her. Do not be bitter toward her. In short: Give yourself up for her. This is a tall order. Remember, all of these are descriptions of what Christ does perfectly for his Church, for you. If you stumble or fail then take refuge in the one who is the perfect bridegroom, who covers all

your sins with his blood and pours out his love on you, which you receive both for yourself and to exercise toward your wife. Hear his Gospel. Receive his body and blood. You'll never look at these duties without being cut to the heart. Nevertheless Christ does these duties through you for your wife's great good, fills up what you lack, forgives your sins, and strengthens you as a reflection of him.



Talk: Wife, out of all the specifics mentioned under your husband's duties, which ones best communicate his love for you? Why? Husband, which of your duties do you enjoy doing? Why? Which ones are difficult for you?

Pray: Lord Jesus, no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it (Eph. 5:29). We are one flesh with You through Your heavenly union with Your Church, and You care for us as Your tender bride and feed us with Your very body and blood. You have shown us honor as the weaker vessel (1 Pet. 3:7), bearing the burden of our sins for us lest we be crushed beneath them. And You have not been bitter toward us because of what You suffered (Col. 3:9), but after taking all the hatred of mankind You have responded only with love. As husbands are nourished and cherished by You in Your Church, grant that they nourish and cherish their own wives. Make husbands providers for their wives and protectors of them. Let them not rely on their own means or strength but receive all things as good gifts from You and gladly pass them on to their own wives. Give husbands tenderness and honor toward their wives. Make them truly gentle men who do not act with bitterness or speak with harshness, but who know how to receive the bad and respond with good. Conform husbands to Your image, that they would be pictures of the Gospel in their homes, reflecting You, the true and heavenly Bridegroom, until we see You face to face. Amen.

Do: Husband, learn your duties by heart. Write them out in a list, if necessary. Wife, encourage your husband as he does his duties.

Day 17

How to Subordinate Yourself to Your Husband, part 1



ife, now that you've heard your husband's duties and seen what great things Christ gives you through him, we now turn to your duties and husband, you'll see what great things Christ gives you through her.

1

Willingly subordinate yourself.

Willing subordination is the most frequently listed duty for wives; it comes up in Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18, Titus 2:5, and 1 Peter 3:1. You've already seen how subordination to Christ benefits the Church and how in Christ's order to be subordinate to someone ultimately means to receive Christ's benefits through that person. And yet while subordinating yourself (that is, taking your place in Christ's order under your husband) benefits you, it is still a duty requiring something of you. So what does subordinating yourself look like? It has already been noted in the fifth lesson that it is not a particular set of actions so much as it is a proper mindset that permeates everything you do. You are to see in your husband Christ himself, and therefore you learn subordination by taking part in the Church's willing subordination to Christ.

How does the Church subordinate herself to Christ and honor him as her head? The Church approaches Christ in humility and meekness, not in pride or presumption. She does not argue with Christ's Word but says "Amen" to it. The Church regards herself as dependent on Christ, and is not ashamed to be such. Her identity is not lost in such dependence, but rather defined by it, like how you, wife, took your husband's name upon being wed, yet remain an individual. The Church prays to Christ, that is, asks him to give and do various things, confident that he will not turn her away. The Church regards Christ as her rock, fortress, and refuge, and is not ashamed to admit her weakness and inability and rely on him. The Church recognizes that every good thing she has she has through Christ and not from herself. Her response to this is to speak highly of Christ to others, to recount his marvelous deeds toward her (his giving up of himself), and to respond to Christ himself with thanksgiving for what he has given and done. In all things she speaks, acts, and regards Christ with the greatest respect, reverence,

and honor, acknowledges him as higher, and rejoices that he has arranged things this way.

Now wife, you may point out that you were able to take fine care of yourself before you got married. You weren't naked, dirty, and lying in the gutter the way we were when Christ took us as his bride. Even now that you are married you aren't completely dependent on your husband (in fact, oftentimes it seems the other way around). Your husband's word isn't perfect like Christ's Word, you can get things for yourself without having to pray your husband for them, you may have plenty of your own abilities and a strong nature. There seems to be some disconnect here between you and the Church.

Yet in Ephesians 5:22 it does not say, "Wives, willingly subordinate yourselves to your own husbands, as to a man." But what does it say? "Wives, willingly subordinate yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord." Your willing subordination to your husband is not a reflection of the fact that you aren't, properly speaking, dependent on him or that you have plenty of your own abilities. Rather, your willing subordination reflects the Church's subordination to Christ. In other words, you don't subordinate yourself to your husband according to what he deserves, but according to what Christ has done for you.

Therefore you regard yourself as dependent on your husband (even if you aren't completely). You acknowledge your husband as the one through whom you receive the good gifts of God (even if you're working and he's been laid off). You speak highly of your husband as if you were singing hymns of Christ himself (even if there doesn't seem to be much to praise). You regard your husband as the greatest, highest, most honorable person on earth and show him respect and reverence at all times (even if he's done absolutely nothing to deserve it). You give this reverence not to a man, but to Christ himself, who is the ultimate holder of the office of Husband and who identifies himself with your husband by giving him the same office. In other words, when you look at your husband you don't just see a man, but by faith you see a man wrapped up in Christ himself: your husband clothed with the Husband.

It is only by Christ that you are able to subordinate yourself. Jesus fills you with his Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) given to you in Baptism, and the three results are the first words of verses 19, 20, and 21, the last being willing subordination. When you willingly subordinate yourself to your husband you are not acting of yourself, but the Holy Spirit is bringing it forth. And so in Christ you witness the undoing of the curse from Genesis: while the desire of the sinful flesh is "against your husband" (Genesis 3:16), the new creation that emerges and arises with

Christ from the baptismal font willingly subordinates herself to her husband as to the Lord.



Talk: Wife, when do you find it easiest to subordinate yourself to your husband? When do you find it most difficult? Husband, give your wife some examples of when you have felt respected, revered, and honored by her.

Pray: Lord Jesus, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Mt. 28:18), You have made the position of subordination very desirable for Your Church. You act as our head, not to lord but to serve, and are not the bane of the body, but its Savior (Eph. 5:23). Make this position of subordination under Your authority desirable for all wives. As the Church approaches You with reverence and humility, so may wives approach their husbands. As the Church says “Amen” to Your gracious words, so may wives receive the words of their husbands for their great good. As the Church prays to You with confidence and takes refuge in You in time of need, so drive wives toward their own husbands to express their needs and receive help in time of worry or trouble. The Church praises You for Your steadfast love and faithfulness. Make all husbands the glory of their wives, and put words of thanks and praise on the lips of wives toward their husbands. Grant wives to see the benefit of such willing subordination toward their own husbands and keep us both, as members of Your Church, subordinate to You so that we may continue to receive Your good gifts. Amen.

Do: Wife, pay attention to what your husband says and does. When he is a good image of Christ then respect him all the more. When he is not a good image of Christ, say to yourself, “Wives, willingly subordinate yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord,” particularly emphasizing the last words. Husband, continue to attend to your duties.

Day 18

How to Subordinate Yourself to Your Husband, part 2



ife, having heard your chief duty, let us examine some of your other duties that are mentioned in Scripture:

2

Fear your husband.

Ephesians 5:33 says, “let the wife see that she respects her husband.” This is a pansy translation. It literally reads “fear her husband.” The reason that most English translations opt for “respect” instead of “fear” is that the word fear has many negative connotations. A wife fearing her husband evokes images of abuse or domestic violence. Yet we must let God’s Word define the words he chooses and not change his words on account of our own definitions. So what is the proper and godly meaning of this fear? We get the definitive clue in Ephesians 5:21 where it says that you subordinate yourself “in the fear of Christ.” Understanding what it means to fear your husband necessarily involves understanding what it means for the Church to fear Christ.

Consider, what is the thing the Church has most cause to be afraid of? Should the Church be afraid of lacking daily bread? No, Jesus has made her promises that he will care for her. Should the Church be afraid of persecution? No, Jesus has made her promises of upholding her and granting her steadfastness and using suffering and trial for her good. Should the Church be afraid of the devil coming and abducting her away from Jesus? No, Jesus has promised to defend his bride and keep the devil at bay, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.

Now the three things listed (and many more) seem legitimately frightening. And yet they’re not, because the Church has Jesus with his promises. So what is truly fearful? Being without Jesus. If Jesus withdrew from his Church all the things that seem frightening (but aren’t on account of him) actually become frightening because we’re no longer protected from them. The thing the Church should fear the most is offending Jesus by rejecting him and doubting his promises and so removing herself from his grace and putting herself back under God’s wrath. So Jesus says in Matthew 10:28, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Now understand, this isn’t fear of what *is* but of

how things *would be* without Jesus. Peter explains this in 1 Peter 3:6 when he lists among the wife's duties, "do not fear anything that is frightening." When the Church fears what she's supposed to fear (which is having Christ as a stern Judge instead of a Savior) then nothing else in the world is the least bit fearful. So the Church sings in Psalm 118:6, "The LORD is for me; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Now what does this mean for you as a wife? It means stop worrying. Don't worry about money. Your husband, as an image of Christ giving himself up, would sooner have to feed you his right arm than let you go hungry, shelter you with his body even if all other shelter is lacking, wrap himself around you if all clothing fails. Don't worry about the future. Don't worry about the present. Don't worry about the past. Don't fret if something breaks. Don't despair if things don't go according to plan. Instead go to your husband and ask him to do something about it. One of the greatest ways you can insult your husband is by expressing, either by word or deed, that you think he's unable to take care of you, that you doubt his protection and provision, that you'd rather faithlessly worry than take refuge in him.

Again there is some dissimilarity between your husband and Christ. You probably could survive without your husband. Nevertheless, fear your husband with the fear of Christ, not because you couldn't survive without your husband, but because the Church couldn't survive without hers. Being a wife means reflecting the Church.

3

Do not let your adorning be external.

It says in 1 Peter 3:3-4, "Do not let your adorning be external – the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear – but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious." To summarize: however much effort you put toward doing your hair or makeup, applying moisturizers or fragrances, selecting jewelry, shopping for clothes, coordinating outfits and shoes and handbags, give that attention and much more to being meek, gentle, humble, peaceful, soft-spoken, and adorning yourself with good works (see also 1 Timothy 2:9-10).

Your husband is a very visual creature. If you're going to beautify yourself for him, don't appeal to his base desires the way a prostitute

could. Rather, appeal to the new man who emerged from the baptismal font. That man is attracted to faithfulness to Christ, love of God's Word, and the qualities that the Church exhibits in relation to Christ. This doesn't mean you can't be physically attractive. It means that you are to regard superficial beauty as exactly that: superficial. Focus on the inner cosmetics that can only be applied by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God: gentleness instead of brashness, contentment instead of worldliness, self-control instead of indulgence. In this way, just as Christ presents the Church to himself in splendor, so Christ presents you to your husband in splendor.



Talk: Wife, what sorts of things most tempt you to worry? Husband, how might you take care of these things for your wife? Husband, what internal qualities do you find most attractive in your wife?

Pray: Heavenly Bridegroom, because of Your grace and protection Your Church lives unafraid of evil and calamity, unafraid of sin and death, unafraid of the devil and the world. The Lord is our light and our salvation; whom shall we fear? The Lord is the stronghold of our life; of whom shall we be afraid? When evildoers assail us to eat up our flesh, our adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against us, our heart shall not fear; though war arise against us, yet we will be confident (Ps. 27:1-3), for what can they do that You, by Your cross and tomb, have not already undone? The only thing we need fear is rejecting You, who have done us such good and rescued us from all disaster. Keep us faithful to You and free from worry, doubt, and fear, and forgive our offenses when we do wrong. Strengthen all wives to live in holy fear toward their husbands (Eph. 5:33), that trusting in the care of their husbands they would not fear anything that is frightening (1 Pet. 3:6). Keep wives free from worry and terror and despair. Make their husbands a constant refuge and source of strength as You are for Your Church. Adorn wives with a gentle and quiet spirit (1 Pet. 3:4), with modesty, self-control, and good works (1 Tim. 2:9-10). Grant these same things to Your bride, the Church, so that even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we would fear no evil, for You are with us (Ps. 23:4). Amen.

Do: Wife, learn your duties by heart. Husband, encourage your wife as she does her duties. Continue to beautify your wife by presenting God's Word to her and praying for her daily.

Day 19

Mammon



ou've come a long way already, having heard the history of marriage, the order of headship, reconciliation, and how to carry out your duties. In the next several lessons we'll touch on topics that are the biggest causes of conflict in marriage. I don't want you to see this as looking at marriage pessimistically, but rather arming yourself against the evil one, because we are not unaware of his schemes.

The first area of conflict we'll hit is money, or more broadly speaking, mammon, which includes both money and possessions. Now having mammon is not a problem. No one ever went to hell for being well off. But when you put mammon and your sinful flesh together in the same room it's like seating Uncle Tony and Aunt Catherine together at your wedding reception. (There goes the security deposit, and I hear they still haven't gotten the blood out of the carpet). The sinful flesh and mammon aren't a good match because 1) the sinful flesh is selfish and sees mammon as a means to gratify its desires, and 2) the sinful flesh will trust anything except Jesus, and when you take Jesus off the table then mammon seems to offer the most security.

Now if one would like to make the problem of sinful-flesh-plus-mammon even worse, all anyone would have to do is exactly what you've already done: put two sinful fleshs in the same room with each other and then share the mammon. Let's apply this dastardly situation to the two problems mentioned and sort through them.

1

The sinful flesh is selfish.

You know how this goes. Husband, you see some shiny new toy, like a cordless drill or a television or a motorcycle and on a whim you just buy it. Or wife, you see the cutest pair of shoes and just have to have them. In all thirteen available colors. This is called impulse buying, and what you need to understand is that the impulse comes from your selfish, sinful flesh. Husband, you're not looking to love and serve your wife by purchasing all of aisle twenty at Best Buy. Wife, you're not looking to love and serve your husband by decimating the women's clothing department. You're serving yourselves, and it's no wonder the other gets upset with you.

"But it's my money. Can't I do with it what I want?" No, you can't. Because it's not your money. You pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," your heavenly Father blesses you with a paycheck (when what your flesh really deserves is to starve to death), and then you make claims of rights and ownership when in fact you have neither. Understand that your true needs have been completely satisfied by Christ. What need do you have of these trinkets that require time, maintenance, sacrifice, and cost – and then repay you by breaking, failing, and making you leave them to others when you die? The things of earth are shifting and fleeting and gratify nothing without leaving an even stronger craving. But Christ has given you heavenly, eternal treasures, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. "According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3-4).

Jesus still gives mammon on earth, but not for the use of the sinful flesh. Its purpose is to grant you daily bread and give you means to love your neighbor. So husband, spending mammon on your wife out of love is a good work; spending mammon on yourself out of selfishness is a sin. And vice versa for you, wife. The cure for this selfishness is to realize how much you have in Christ. He spared nothing, not even his life, to make you wealthy with the eternal currency of his holy, precious blood.

2

The sinful flesh is secure when it has mammon.

You probably also know how the false security of mammon goes. The car unexpectedly needs a repair and you end up at each other's throats, even though neither of you made the car break and even though you have the money to pay for it. Or money ends up tight one month and you feel a constant agitation, as if a leech were sucking out your lifeblood, and you take it out on each other. (All this to say nothing of mammon lost when it *is* someone's fault. Oh, the bloodshed!)

These problems don't come from a failure to budget properly or manage money correctly. These problems arise because your sinful flesh bases its whole life and security and salvation on mammon. And when mammon fails (because that's what mammon does) your flesh rages as if God himself had just died. Oh, what wretched people we are that we worship the creation instead of the Creator, that we bow down to idols of silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do

not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have the faces of founding fathers, but do not give presidential addresses, and they do not make a sound in their throat. Take heed: “Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them” (Psalm 115:8, 135:18).

Repent, and believe in the Gospel! Jesus Christ has reconciled you to the Father, forgiven your sins, and caused every good and perfect gift to come your way by grace. Jesus taught you to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” so that you look to your Father for provision and not to mammon. And he wouldn’t have commanded us to pray it if he didn’t promise to give it. Manna would sooner have to rain from heaven like it did for Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 16) than God’s saints should starve. The Lord made ravens bring bread and meat to Elijah twice a day in the wilderness (1 Kings 17:1-7), made the widow’s jar of flour and jug of oil last through an entire drought in Zarephath (1 Kings 7:8-16). Jesus fed four thousand men, besides women and children, with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish (Mark 8:1-9). This doesn’t mean you can laze about all day (how would that be loving and serving your neighbor?). But it does mean that when your faith and trust are in the one true God, then you don’t have to worry about mammon.

So you see that Jesus has 1) satisfied your eternal needs, and 2) given you a sure foundation for security. You are free to use mammon for the good of others and need not give it more credit than it deserves.



Talk: Think of a conflict that’s arisen in your house on account of mammon. How did each of you respond? Based on what you learned in this lesson, what would be a better way to respond?

Pray: Heavenly Father, You have made us rich, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Your Son (1 Pet. 1:18-19). You are gracious to us for His sake and You grant us our daily bread out of Your fatherly divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in us. What could we possibly return to You for all Your provision? All things are Yours, whether in heaven or on earth. Receive our thanks and bring Your mercies constantly to our remembrance. Forgive our idolatry, for we have trusted in created things instead of You, the Creator of all things. We have loved

mammon, we have trusted in it, we have shown more devotion to it than to You and Your Word. Blot out our sins for the sake of Your Son. Assure us of our richness in Him and keep our hearts from straying. Guide us in making good use of the mammon You have entrusted to us. Stir up Your love in our hearts, that we would more readily spend money on others than ourselves. Guard us from despair in those times when You decrease our mammon. Turn our hearts toward You, and let the words of Job be on our lips, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Give us neither poverty nor riches; feed us with the food that is needful for us, lest we be full and deny You and say, "Who is the Lord?" or lest we be poor and steal and profane the name of our God (Prov. 30:8-9). Content us with whatever accords with Your good pleasure, and make our greatest contentment be in Your Son, in whose name we present our requests to You. Amen.

Do: If you have trouble with impulse buying, use a list when you walk into stores. Buy nothing that isn't on the list, even if it means going home, making a new list with the things you forgot to put on the first one, and going back to the store. Make a budget together. A good rule of thumb is give 10% to your congregation, save 10% for the future, and live on the remaining 80%. Of that 80% set aside money for each of you to spend on the other. Also set aside some money for helping others in need. If you're unsure how to split up the 80%, track your spending for a few months, see what sorts of categories you spend money on (housing, groceries, utilities, clothing, gifts, dates, toiletries, etc.), and budget accordingly.

Day 20

Pleonexia



Another of the big causes of conflict in marriage is what Paul calls *pleonexia*. This is a Greek word that means “having more,” the desire to have something that is not rightfully yours nor given to you by God. Here’s how he uses the word in Colossians 3:5, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and *pleonexia*, which is idolatry.” *Pleonexia* is translated “covetousness” in the ESV and can refer to the desire for material wealth as in Luke 12:15. But from the context we see that Paul is referring to a specific place of covetousness, a certain realm of “having more,” and that is in marital relations. The place of sexual morality, purity, self-control, good desire, and contentment – the reverse of everything he lists – is in marriage, but only when marriage is lived according to the commandments of God.

Let’s take up some examples that illustrate the point. Husband, it’s most likely that you struggle with *pleonexia* in regard to physical appearance and sexuality. Before you were married your natural desires were seeking a woman, and God has now given you your wife. This is good. God authorized a woman for you with whom you can have sexual relations without sinning. This is one of the purposes of marriage that Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 7:2, “But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.” And you probably were satisfied for a while and guarded against temptation.

But then *pleonexia* kicked in. Your sinful flesh reared its ugly head and started looking for more. Perhaps it was a roving eye when out in public. Perhaps it was drinking in hyper-sexualized television shows or movies. Perhaps it was giving in to the enticement of pornography. Whatever the case may be, your flesh is not content with what God has given but wants to have more, and to have those things that God has not given you. If this *pleonexia* is given free reign, it leads to abandoning the marriage bed, sexual activity apart from your wife, and eventually divorce.

Wife, it’s most likely that you struggle with *pleonexia* in the realm of emotional care and connectedness. Before you were married you were seeking a man to care about you, and God has now given you your husband. Again, this is good. God authorized a man for you from

whom you can receive care, and you can even live in the same house with him without sinning. It's likely that you were very satisfied with the care of your husband for a while.

But then *pleonexia* attacked you as well, spurring on the search for more. Your husband's ears seemed dull, his speech predictable, his care monotonous. Perhaps you simply pined away in discontent, perhaps you took to romance novels, perhaps you disregarded the care of your husband and looked for it among friends. If this *pleonexia* continues, then the home becomes like two strangers living together, the care of other men becomes insanely tempting, and again the door is thrown wide open for adultery and divorce.

Now this is painting with rather broad and extreme strokes. *Pleonexia* is often a subtle discontent and unrecognized despising of God's gifts. And the situations can be reversed: a husband can be drawn to the emotional care and connectedness of another woman, and a wife can be seduced by the physical appearance and sexuality of other men. But hopefully at this point you have something of a looming image of *pleonexia*.

It's interesting that Paul doesn't pair *pleonexia* with the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not commit adultery." Rather he pairs *pleonexia* with idolatry, the breaking of the First Commandment, "You shall have no other gods." *Pleonexia* says, "Forget what God has given me. What does he know about my needs? I'm taking what I want for myself. I decide what I get. I'm God."

What is the solution for this grave sin against your spouse and this even greater sin against God? Paul comforts the Colossians with Baptism: "you have put off the old man with his practices and have put on the new that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created him" (Colossians 3:9-10). You have put off "the body of the flesh" by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in Baptism (Colossians 2:11-12). Christ is drowning the sinful flesh with its *pleonexia* in the baptismal font and raising a new man that Christ is renewing into the uncorrupted image of God that man had at creation.

The new man recognizes the gifts of God as far better than anything he could come up with himself. The flesh invents penance; the new man delights in salvation by grace apart from works. The flesh makes itself suffer; the new man takes refuge in the sufferings of Christ. The flesh practices *pleonexia*; the new man at this point knows that the flesh comes up with stupid ideas and that God spares nothing in order to give the best gifts. Thus the new man in Christ is content. So when

pleonexia rages, make the sign of the cross, say, “I am baptized,” and remind yourself of where you would be if not for the gifts of Christ.

Martin Luther also offers some excellent practical advice for dealing with *pleonexia* in a wedding sermon on Ephesians 5:

Realize that after you are married the devil will tempt you with adventurous curiosity and forbidden lust... You will not perfectly love your wife. As a result, from time to time other thoughts will enter your mind, suggesting that another woman is prettier and lovelier than your wife. In the same way also, your wife will not perfectly love you. Consequently, some other man may turn her head... Even though you might be chaste, you nonetheless will feel such temptations in your heart, stirred up by your flesh and inspired by the devil—especially if you want to be a Christian. This is why you here must once more be armed with God’s Word. It tells you: “This is your flesh and your bone given and ordained to you from God.” By this Word, she is adorned in sheer purple and pieces of gold and precious stones, above all other women on earth. You will not be able to choose or select a better one. In this way, you can fend off adventurous curiosity and resist the devil so that no other woman becomes lovelier or more desirable than your wife—even if she is homely, obstinate, odd, and unfriendly... Therefore, let everyone see to it that he may abide by God’s Word and look at his spouse according to it. According to the Word of God, your spouse is clad in the most beautiful jewels put on by God... If you look at your marriage like this and regard it as so precious and priceless, nobody else’s wife will please you as much as your own wife. For the Word will not allow it. Even if you think that some other woman’s words or gestures are most kind and beautiful, she is nonetheless—in comparison to your wife—totally ugly in your eyes. For in her you do not find the adornment, which is God’s Word. Yet your wife is the prettiest and loveliest for you because she is the one whom God himself has adorned with his dear Word.

from What Is Marriage, Really? Chapter 6, pages 33-35




Talk: What is *pleonexia*? In what areas of your marriage do you struggle with *pleonexia*? How might you help each other fight *pleonexia*?

Pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, You have given us everything we need and have withheld no good from us. And if this were too little, You would add to us as much more (2 Sam. 12:8). You have satisfied our desires with the good gift of each other. We certainly have not deserved such favor from You, and we praise You for it. Yet how have we repaid You? We confess that, as You have fed us, our flesh has only increased its appetite, seeking things You have not given and always desiring to have more. You have given marriage as the proper place for sexual and emotional fulfillment and we seek that fulfillment everywhere else instead. O Lord, have mercy upon us! Christ, have mercy upon us! Lord, have mercy upon us! And You have, by sparing us and making Your Son suffer in our place. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's (Ps. 103:2-5). Satisfy us with the good within our marriage. Make us right judges of what is good, not accepting bribes from the flesh but only calling "good" those things that have the sanction of Your Holy Word. Give us delight in each other and bind us together. Save us when we are in the midst of temptation and grant us strength to persevere against it. Make our faithfulness to each other reflect the faithfulness of Christ to the Church, and at the end of days awaken us and satisfy us with Your likeness (Ps. 17:15). Amen.

Do: If sexual *pleonexia* is a temptation for one or both of you, then be more purposeful about coming together in the marriage bed. If the emotional connectedness kind of *pleonexia* is a problem, then spend time together each day talking, and listen attentively when the other is talking. In general, 1) respond positively to physical advances from your spouse, and 2) listen to each other, not as a means to an end, but as a good in itself.

Day 21

Reputation

 e've hit mammon and *pleonexia* as likely causes of conflict within marriage. Next we'll look at reputation. The word reputation from the Latin means to "consider repeatedly." This is quite easy to illustrate. When you hear the name William Shakespeare you think "playwright." When you hear the name Aristotle you think "philosopher." When you hear the name Jesus you think "Savior." Those men have a reputation for those things, meaning every time the name comes up, the things associated with the name come with it – it's what you repeatedly consider about them.

Now you, husband, have a name and reputation, and wife, so do you. And in marriage no one is in a better position to ruin your reputation than the other. You live with each other and only you know what happens behind closed doors: how he drops his dirty clothes everywhere except in the hamper, how she drools on her pillow when she sleeps, how he puts the carton of milk back in the refrigerator with approximately three molecules left in the bottom, how she has the ability to release flatulence that could rival mustard gas – quirks, habits, sins, embarrassing tidbits, things that drive you nuts. You're armed with all of this inside information as you step out the door and interact with the rest of the world. And you could permanently attach any of these things to the name and reputation of your spouse.

Now you both know the position you're in, how you could ruin and injure the other's reputation in a way no one else could. And there are times you've used that inside information to hurt the other. Sometimes another husband is revealing his wife's shortcomings and you find some commonality and chime in about your wife's shortcomings, not caring how much it would hurt her. Sometimes there's an argument fresh in your mind as you, wife, talk with a friend, and you can't help but try to get your friend on your side, even at the expense of making your husband seem unreasonable, unloving, or stupid. Sometimes in group settings the topic turns to differences between men and women, often pitting them against each other instead of rejoicing in God's good distinction and ordering of the two, and when that happens all the dirt comes out.

You both know the damage you can do, and you both know how much that damage hurts when it happens to you. "Great, now all your

friends think I'm an idiot." "Why'd you say that? Now your mother thinks I don't do anything around the house!" "Now I'm the Lazy, the Moron, the Oblivious, the Weak, the Air Head, the Careless, the Slob, the Screwup" – pick your title. And you know how you react to this; you've not only been hurt by the person closest to you, but you've been hurt *because of* your closeness. The gloves are off, you declare war, trust flies out the window, and a painful bitterness infects all your words and actions toward the other.

The Eighth Commandment is "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." Martin Luther explains it very well in the Small Catechism, "We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way." Often it's not a problem of telling lies about each other. But betraying, slandering, hurting the other's reputation? You are guilty as charged. You deserve not only a bad reputation yourself: you deserve the wrath of God.

What is the solution? First is reconciliation. Confess your betrayal and slander of the other and receive the forgiveness that Jesus gives. He's the one who was betrayed by one of those closest to him, slandered before the world, assigned a place between two thieves. Yet in bearing this ruined reputation that we gave him, he saved us. Hence when you hear the name of Jesus you don't think "thief," but "Savior." He's the one who forgives this sin. So confess it to the other and be reconciled.

Next comes restoration. You can't take words back, just as you can't unring a bell. What you can do is overwrite them. The way you do this is you stop the betraying, slandering, and hurting of the other's reputation, and instead defend the other if someone speaks against him or her, speak in high and glowing words about the other, and if an explanation is necessary about the speech or behavior of the other then explain it in the kindest way, giving them the benefit of the doubt and putting the best construction on it. Leave the quirks, embarrassing tidbits, transgressions, and pet peeves at home.

In the eyes of the world, you, husband, are to portray your wife as holy and without blemish just as Christ presents the Church to himself. And you, wife, are to praise and honor your husband before the world the way the Church praises Christ. Is the Church sinless? No, but when we are brought before our heavenly Father, Jesus clothes and covers us with his righteousness so that we appear sinless. In the same way, cover each other with kind words, knowing that Christ suffered a bad reputation in order to give you a good one, knowing that Christ

presents you blameless before God, and knowing that this is not a deception or lie, but that one day you both will be completely holy and without blemish for the sake of Christ.

Finally, a word on prevention. There are several good practices that lead to giving the other a good reputation and avoiding the things that cause a bad one:

- Make up your mind that you will not use your inside information to hurt the other, no matter how easy and tempting it may be.
- Resolve also to speak only kind things about the other, and as the old saying goes, “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all.”
- Never leave the house angry with each other. Reconcile before you walk out the door, especially when you know you’re about to be interacting and talking with other people, e.g. before work, or before visiting with family.
- Reconcile before having people over to your house as well. The home is often the easiest place to betray each other, because 1) that’s where most of the things happen that you might mention, and 2) there are places and objects all over the house and before your eyes to remind you of the sins and embarrassing tidbits of the other. Be on guard.
- If you’re talking about the other with someone else and your spouse is not present, imagine that your spouse is there looking right at you and waiting with bated breath to hear what you’ll say. You know whatever you say will work its way back anyway, so you might as well say it with that in mind.



Talk: What is a reputation? Why do you have more influence over the other’s reputation than anyone else in the world? Husband, what do you love about your wife? What are her virtues and praiseworthy qualities? What has she done out of love for you? Remember what you say, and use those words and phrases when speaking to others about your wife. Wife, do the same for your husband.

Pray: O Lord of might, who in ancient times gave the Law, You have protected our reputations by commanding us not to give false testimony against our neighbor (Ex. 20:16). In Your Son You have even clothed us with Your own name, that before Your throne we would not have a reputation as sinners, but as saints. Forgive us the many times we have taken the names and reputations of others in our mouths and done with them as we pleased. We ask especially that You would graciously cover those times when we as husband and wife have smeared the other's name. Regard us in the name of Your Son, who saves His people from their sins. Make us like You: bestowing a good name on others even if it's not deserved. Especially with each other make us eager to cover offenses, to conceal what has been said and done in confidence, and to preserve the other's name from blemish. Defend our individual reputations through the other. Make husbands like Christ, who presents the Church to Himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Eph. 5:27). Make wives like the Church, who honors and praises her Bridegroom. Continue to cover us with the holy name You have given us in Baptism, assure us that our sins are forgiven, and finally bring us to be with You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Do: Give the other the gift of a good reputation. Husband, speak highly of your wife to others and recount the loving things she has done. Wife, do the same when you speak of your husband with others.

Day 22

Parents



ou remember the institution of marriage from Genesis 2. The Lord joined the Man and the Woman together in Holy Matrimony. The Man sang in joy over his wife, calling her “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” And then it says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). There was a certain abandoning of the former things that accompanied your marriage. Wife, you were given your husband’s name just as the Church received the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in Baptism. Husband, you left your father and mother just as Jesus left the side of his Father and the hallowed halls of heaven to come to earth for his bride. This leaving of family and uniting in new life together is a beautiful picture of Christ and the Church.

And yet, wife, you still have the same first name given to you by your parents, just as members of the Church are called Christians and yet retain their individual names. And husband, you still have a father and mother, just as on earth Jesus was still the Son of his Father. This leads to the question: what is the proper relation between this verse from Genesis 2:24 and the Fourth Commandment, which says, “Honor your father and your mother”?

It’s very likely that, even without an explanation from Scripture, you’ve already wrestled with how to be a husband and a son, a wife and a daughter. Or a son-in-law or daughter-in-law, which in some ways is even trickier. What do you need to know in order to navigate the relation of your household to the households from which you came?

1

Your spouse always takes precedence.

When it comes to your parents you are from their flesh, the result of them being one flesh with each other. But you are not “one flesh” with your parents. That phrase “one flesh” is reserved for your spouse alone. Being born of someone puts you in close relation to each other; being married to someone in a sense eliminates the concept of relationship. “Relationship” refers to how two different things interact or correlate. With that in mind, marriage is not, properly speaking, a relationship. It does not relate two people to each other in a new way.

It makes them one. Your union as one flesh is primary over every relationship, including the one to your parents. Because your marriage isn't a relationship: it's a unity.

What does this mean in practice? It means that if you have to choose between your spouse and your parents, you choose your spouse every time. Husband, if your parents speak ill of your wife then with all due honor you vehemently disagree and you speak of your wife as the most valuable and important person on earth, noting that their words against her are words against you. Wife, if there's unkind speech about your husband then you tell your parents, "I will honor you as my father and/or mother, but I will not listen to you slander my husband." Husband, if your parents demean your wife then you tell them, again with all due honor, how excellent she is. If their behavior toward her doesn't stop then you protect your wife as Christ protects his Church: "I will honor you as my parent and care for you should you be in need. But so long as you attack my wife realize that you're cutting yourself off from your own son. I belong to her and she to me, and I will not allow attack to come near her, even if it's from my own family." Wife, if your family attempts to manipulate you in such a way as to turn you against your husband (even if what they say is true and even if your own flesh loves to hear it) you shut your ears and remain faithful to your own bone and flesh.

Now hopefully any family conflicts that may have arisen aren't as bad as all that, but I use these rather extreme examples to show just how serious your unity is as husband and wife. Keeping all of this in mind, here's another important point to consider:

2

Without your parents you wouldn't exist.

Martin Luther put this very well commenting on the Fourth Commandment in the Large Catechism, "By means of the commandments, [God] reminds and impels all people to think of what their parents have done for them. Then they realize that they have received their bodies and lives from their parents and have been nourished and nurtured by their parents when otherwise they would have perished a hundred times in their own filth" (I.129).

You always prefer and defend your spouse, but the Fourth Commandment requires that you do it with honor and respect and that you as husband and wife exercise tolerance and forbearance with your parents, both on account of God's command and on account of the life

he's given you through them. If they're doing something to attack your spouse or your marriage then take your stand (with honor toward them). But don't take your stand on inconvenience. Your parents are your neighbors too (in the sense of "love your neighbor as yourself"), for whom you exercise the self-sacrificing love of Christ. Make time for them. Go out of your way to see them. Speak with them and act toward them with the honor that you would show God himself. Always speak highly of your parents, even when it's just the two of you. If there's a problem don't assume hatred or an attack on their part, but give them the benefit of the doubt and talk with them openly and honestly. Assume they know something about marriage, and don't be afraid to ask advice (as long as you don't betray your spouse by doing so).

3

Your parents and your spouse need not be set against each other.

Keeping the first two points in mind, you can see that while family is a common area of conflict it does not have to be. When Christ took the Church as his bride she benefitted greatly by also gaining a heavenly Father and being considered his dear child. See your parents as an important and welcome part of your life together (without whom you wouldn't have a life together), and let them see the joy you have in your spouse. In this way your marriage can strengthen your family and your family can strengthen your marriage.



Talk: Recall a recent or ongoing conflict with parents or family. In what way did it affect you as husband and wife? How can you put the best construction on it and understand the family's perspective? How did you react then? Remembering the three points from this lesson, how might you handle it differently now?


Pray: Heavenly Father, from whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named (Eph. 3:15), we give You thanks for the gift of earthly parents. Through our parents You have nourished us, defended us, taught us, and preserved our lives. We have left our fathers and mothers, not out of contempt for them, but so that husband might hold fast to wife according to Your good order, and You have made us one

flesh. We confess, we have not honored our parents as we should according to Your will. We have too quickly forgotten all the good You have bestowed on us through them. And, on the other hand, we have also not upheld our union before our family: we have spoken unkindly about one another and have not properly defended each other. For all this we ask for grace; we want to do better. Forgive our sins and leave them forever in Your Son's abandoned tomb. Give us wisdom so that we may behave respectfully toward our parents and at the same time remain faithful to each other. Make our parents to be a source of help and advice, that they would support and strengthen us in our marriage. And make our marriage a cause of happiness for our parents, that they would take heart that You have not left us alone in the world. Remind us of Your commandment to honor father and mother (Ex. 20:12) and grant us the blessing that accompanies that command: "that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you" (Dt. 5:16). Keep all things in harmony and prevent all discord; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Do: Make a conscious effort to let your family see how much enjoyment you get from each other. Participate in family gatherings. If possible, host a family gathering in your home.

Day 23

Children

fter the Lord created the Man and the Woman and wed them to each other, God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). This is not merely “reproduction,” like the cold, impersonal manufacturing of a bunch of identical cake-toppers. This is *procreation*, that is, the continuation of God’s creative work: very personal, very unique, the joining of your two bodies into one flesh aimed toward the singular end of begetting and bearing new life. Procreation is a glorious gift of God by which you not only get to share in God’s work, but God works in you, as David praises the Lord in Psalm 139:13, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.” The children that God creates through procreation are likewise called a “heritage from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3). Procreation and the children created through it are both gifts of God.

Now the topic of children in general is worthy of a completely different devotional book. In this lesson we’ll limit ourselves to children as they relate to you as husband and wife. So first, why are children listed as a frequent area of conflict within marriage? There are two main reasons: 1) your children have a sinful flesh, 2) you have a sinful flesh. We’ll digest these in turn and then look at solutions.

1

Your children have a sinful flesh.

Your children are not innocent little angels. Straight out of the womb they scream and cry, not only to communicate their needs, but also because their corrupted flesh demands that the world revolve around it. If you recall from the book of Genesis the Lord made man in his image and likeness. When God created man “he made him in the likeness of God” (Genesis 5:1). But then we hear two verses later, “When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image” (Genesis 5:3), that is, in the *corrupted* image of God. So David confesses in Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Depending on the age of your children you’ve come to realize this in varying degrees. The concise point is that you don’t have to teach your children to sin, but you must go to great pains to make them heed the commandments of God.

How does this become a problem for your marriage? Your children know that as much as you two might be one flesh, you don't share a brain or a mouth. If one of you says one thing and the child doesn't like it, well there's always the other one to try. In this way children don't want to treat you as one flesh and so they despise the very gift of God by which they received life. This can become a serious area of conflict if a child habitually pits you against each other. Instead of the two acting in unity the two act with dissonance, and this can have far-reaching effects on your marriage.

2

You have a sinful flesh.

Children are a gift of God. Yet, as with all gifts of God, we sinful human beings have a habit of worshiping the creation rather than the Creator. There's a fine line in childrearing between loving your children and idolizing them, and the latter often masquerades as the former. It becomes all too easy for your lives to revolve around your children and for you to lose focus on each other. You can get so wrapped up in your offspring that you neglect the union by which they were created. This is one reason why one of the most common times of divorce is right after the kids have all moved out. The lives of husbands and wives become so child-centered that when the children leave the house the only thing that unified the couple disappears and husband and wife can't come up with a good reason to stay together.

Now the second part, how do you avoid letting your children be a cause of conflict in your marriage?

1

Never side with your child instead of your spouse.

Your spouse may be dead wrong. In most parenting decisions it's not about right or wrong. It's about faithfulness. Resolve to be right together and wrong together, but always to act together (the only exception being direct contradiction of God's Word, but hopefully that goes without saying). Along these same lines, husband, you consider your wife's mouth to be your mouth, and wife, you consider your husband's words to be your words. If you disagree on an issue involving your children then withdraw privately together and talk about it. Once you've reached a consensus, stand together before your child and as one flesh announce the verdict.

2

Make the despising of your union one of the greatest offenses in the house.

There are times your children will succeed in pitting you against each other, not hearing what they want from one of you and then getting it out of the other. When this comes to light, make sure that first, the child doesn't get what he or she wanted, and second, the child instead receives the most severe punishment that you're willing to give. In your child's mind this should be among the most heinous sins he or she could possibly commit.

3

Bring your children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

This one is flat out commanded by God. It means you have your children baptized, you bring them to Divine Service every Sunday, and you catechize them at home by diligently teaching God's Word to them, talking of the Scriptures "when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 6:7). Having a set family devotion time is a great way to regularly occupy yourselves with God's Word as a Christian family. Talk with your pastor about how to do this if you have any questions.

4

Spend time together as husband and wife – in front of your children.

Sure, you get time together once the kids are in bed, or if they're older you might have time to slip away for a walk or go on more frequent dates. Keep doing these things. But also make sure that your children see you together. Set time aside each day, call it something like husband-wife time. During this time the two of you sit with each other and interact with each other. Play a game together, sip some tea at the table, cuddle on the couch and talk, whatever sounds good to you. During this time the children are to occupy themselves and leave the two of you alone. This not only lets the two of you focus on each other as husband and wife and solidify the importance of your union in the eyes of your children, but it also gives immense comfort to your children, because as much as their sinful flesh despises your union, deep down they are embedded with the belief that as long as father and

mother are ok, then everything is ok. Thus husband-wife time is not only a gift for you, but also a gift for your children.



Talk: In what ways can children be a cause of conflict in marriage? How have children been an area of conflict in your marriage?

Pray: Dear Father, You Yourself have formed our children (Ps. 139:13) and entrusted them to us as a heritage from You (Ps. 127:3). We have certainly not done anything to earn so great a trust, but we rejoice in Your mercy and favor. We thank You also for the glory with which you have distinguished us by commanding our children to honor us. You know our many failings in raising our children: our selfishness, our anger, our laziness, our slowness to speak Your Word to them. Do not hold these against us we pray. Account them to Your Son and relieve us of the burden of our sins. You know also the sins of our children – sins of rebellion and dishonor. We are poor mediators to plead their cause before You, but listen to the pleas of Your Son, who is the one mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). For His sake forgive their sins as well, that our whole household would consist of those whose robes have been made white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14). Give us increased love for our children and concern for their eternal well being. Put Your words on our lips that we would always be ready to speak them to our children. Uphold our union before their eyes, for our good and theirs. Give our children honor for us as their parents and honor toward the estate of marriage. As many other voices define marriage differently to our children, preserve them in the truth of Your Word. As we come before Your altar on earth, so grant us to stand before You on the Last Day and say, “Behold, I and the children God has given me” (Heb. 2:13); through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Do: If you don’t already have family devotions, begin to. Pick a set time each day, preferably attached to something you already do every day, for instance first thing after you wake up (so long as the kids are up and around) or before or after a specific meal. Discuss what you will do during this time. If you already have family devotions, continue to do so. Have the same discussion about when to have husband-wife time.

Day 24

The Marriage Bed

If you're like most people, when you hear the word "chastity" you think of virginity, or celibacy, or abstinence. Sexual relations and chastity seem incompatible. This goes back to the false idea that seems to have always been tossed around in the Church that one could not have sexual intercourse with one's own spouse without lusting and breaking the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not commit adultery." Yet this is not the case. The word "chaste" means to be cut off from something in the sense of being pure, holy, set apart, reserved. It doesn't mean a lack of sexual relations, but rather locates sexual relations within the exclusivity of marriage. Being chaste *before* marriage meant abstinence. Being chaste *within* marriage means you faithfully and exclusively please each other and procreate in the realm of the marriage bed.

This definition of chastity flows from God's treatment of sexual relations in Scripture. He's the one who told the Man and his wife to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). The congregation at Corinth was of the opinion, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman (1 Corinthians 7:1), to which the Apostle Paul very quickly responds, "But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her due, and likewise the wife to her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:3). Paul goes on to warn, "Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer, but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Corinthians 7:5). In Hebrews 13:4 it says, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." The word translated as "marriage bed" is the Greek word from which we get the word coitus, meaning coming together in sexual intercourse.

What do we learn about marital chastity from these passages? Within marriage sexual intercourse has the command of God (Genesis 1:28) and is called a "due" (1 Corinthians 7:3). Having sexual relations as husband and wife is not only permissible and not at all sinful, but because it is done in obedience to God's command it is also a good work before him, more pleasing to him than if you sold your house and gave

the proceeds to charity. The problem within marriage is not sexual intercourse, but a lack of it. Not coming together in the marriage bed disobeys God's command (Genesis 1:28), is called "depriving one another" of a "due" (1 Corinthians 7:3), is a cause of temptation (1 Corinthians 7:5), and leads to sexual immorality and adultery (Hebrews 13:4). All this to say, if you want a chaste marriage then engage in faithful and frequent sexual relations with each other as husband and wife.

Since coming together in the marriage bed is a good work, is pleasing before God, and keeps the Sixth Commandment, you can bet that Satan is going to try all means possible to keep you from coming together. How does he try to disrupt the marriage bed? We already touched on one point in the lesson on *pleonexia*. Three other tactics of the devil are selfishness, distraction, and lack of communication. We'll examine each in turn.

1 *Selfishness.*

As it is with all your marriage duties so it is in the marriage bed: if you seek to get your due instead of doing your duty, neither of you will benefit. The marriage bed is a selfless place. You each give of yourself entirely to the other, not concerning yourself with what you want, but with what pleases your spouse. And together you set yourselves as on an altar, willing to sacrifice your way of life, your wants and desires, your mammon, your sleep, and much more for the procreation of a child. In this way the marriage bed is no different than all of life: you direct yourself toward your spouse, you direct yourself toward your children, but you never direct yourself toward yourself.

So don't ask, "What can we do that will give me enjoyment?" but, "What can we do that will give the other enjoyment?" This must be especially true for you, husband. You love your wife by giving yourself up for her, by acting for her good and not your own. You must take the lead in selflessness, both on account of your duties and also because, according to God's design, when your body reaches the end of sexual intercourse (and hopefully I can say this without violating your sense of propriety): that's the end of it for you. Selflessness cannot come after you have been satisfied but must come before, when your flesh wants to be entirely selfish. You are to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus in all places.

2

Distraction.

Both of you know how your minds work: bringing things into the marriage bed that you wish would stay in the kitchen or living room or at work or in the million other places where these thoughts belong. At times it's worth stopping to talk or take care of something instead of simply forging on. At other times you simply need to recognize that the devil is stirring up thoughts of other things so that you won't come together, so that your marriage bed will be forsaken, so that he can more easily tempt you to sin. In some instances you will simply have to say, "Shut up, devil. What I'm doing right now is pleasing in the sight of God. You'd love to prevent me from keeping the Sixth Commandment; but out of love for God's commandments, out of love for my spouse, and (as an added bonus) to pour salt on the wound Christ gave you when he crushed your head on the cross: I'm going to keep right on going." In order to prevent distraction it's helpful to talk beforehand about what's on your mind, do chores beforehand, clean up beforehand. Preparing to come together in the marriage bed is often better accomplished by the humdrum business of changing the sheets than by any attempts to counter-distract the flesh. Out of love for each other, and with patience, help clear away the other's distractions.

3

Lack of communication.

Sometimes this is a direct consequence of selfishness, where two individuals seek their own instead of acting as a unity toward the common goals of self-giving love, obedience to the Sixth Commandment, resisting temptation, and procreating. In the case of selfishness there's a lack of communication because neither is even trying to understand the other. Yet sometimes self-consciousness, shame, or fear of sounding selfish leads husband and/or wife to clam up about their sexual relations, giving no words that would help the other love better. Some of this can be overcome by paying attention to the non-verbal communication of the other. Yet much of it depends on speaking openly and honestly with each other, asking what the other enjoys or doesn't enjoy, what works and what doesn't, and answering truthfully when asked.

Conclusion.

God has given the stamp of approval to your marital relations as surely as you said your vows and signed the marriage certificate. He has declared what you do in your marriage bed to be a good work. He has even made it very enjoyable. Delight in his commandment, rejoice at this gift, and give no opportunity to the devil. In this way you will enjoy true chastity, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, as Christ presents the Church to himself.



Talk: What is chastity? What is God's view of sexual relations within marriage? How does the devil try to disrupt the marriage bed? Which of the three tricks of the devil do you struggle with the most?

Pray: O Lord, You have made us one flesh and brought us together in the marriage bed for the procreation of children, for aid against temptation, and for enjoyment of the married state and each other. As the world spurns chastity and perverts human sexuality we praise You for joining us together in Holy Matrimony and giving our marital relations Your approval. Nevertheless, we admit there are times we have acted selfishly in such matters and been distracted from loving and serving each other. If it is a good work to carry out our duties faithfully in the marriage bed, then we have often sinned. Take away these offenses and grant us pardon according to Your steadfast love in Christ. Direct our desires toward each other and never toward anyone else. Make our marriage bed undefiled (Heb. 13:4), just as Christ cleanses us to make us spotless and holy. Give us selflessness when we come together, that our hearts would be set to serve and not to be served. Take away all shame that might come between us, that our life together would resemble life in paradise (Gen. 2:25). Give us joy in this good work You have given us to do and keep us chaste in our marriage. Grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Do: Practice marital chastity.

Day 25

D*vorce



aving covered some of the most common areas of conflict within marriage, we now arrive at the worst case scenario for any marriage: divorce. Division popped into the minds of the Man and his wife when they sinned, and it will plague your thoughts on occasion as well (you can tell it's trying to put itself forward when one or both of you storm from the room). Divorce is the ultimate form of marital division. The most important thing to remember about divorce is that you should not consider it to be an actual option. There are a couple scenarios in Scripture when divorce is *permitted*, but even in those cases it is never *required*.

We see this in Matthew 19 when the Pharisees come to test Jesus by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" (Matthew 19:3). Jesus answers, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:4-6). And there you have it. You didn't join the two of you together. God did. Who are you to undo what God has done? So don't.

Now why does Jesus take divorce so seriously? "It's not working out, we're not feeling it, it's time to move on, why not a divorce?" We get the answer in Ephesians 5:31-32 where Paul quotes that same verse from Genesis 2:24 and then explains what it means: "'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church." That saying in Genesis 2:24 is not ultimately about Adam and Eve. It's about Christ and the Church. If you can get divorced from each other then Christ can get divorced from the Church. He can go back on his promises. His Word could be a lie. After giving his life to save us he could then give us over to the devil and forsake us to hell. Do you see that you would be speaking the ultimate blasphemy against Christ by getting divorced? Your marriage, as a reflection of Christ and his Church, would reflect a selfish, faithless, petty, spiteful God, and instead of confessing the truth of the Scriptures you would be saying with the devil, "Did God really say?" Thus, both

on account of Christ's Word and on account of Christ himself as the Church's bridegroom, do not divorce.

Now in Scripture there are two "permissible" reasons given for divorce, as much as divorce could possibly be considered "permissible" after the explanation you've just heard. The first comes in Matthew 19. Right after Jesus answers the Pharisees' first question they ask, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" (Matthew 19:7). Jesus responds, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery" (Matthew 19:8-9). Adultery is, in a sense, divorce in itself. If divorce is separating what God has joined together, then joining yourself sexually with someone who is not your spouse separates what God has joined together in a way that is much more catastrophic than mere divorce papers. You don't become one flesh by filing a marriage certificate, but through sexual intercourse.

So Paul admonishes the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6:15-16, "Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is written, 'The two will become one flesh.'" The one who commits adultery has already separated what God joined together; filing papers would only be a record of what has already happened. *Yet* there can be repentance and forgiveness and a return to what God has joined together. Let the one who is without sin file for divorce.

The second instance of "permissible" divorce is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7, "To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him... But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?" (1 Corinthians 7:12-13, 15-16). In this case one spouse is a believer and one is an unbeliever. If the unbeliever abandons the believer, the believer is not enslaved. If the unbelieving partner files for divorce, the believing partner can allow the other to leave. Yet steadfast love and long-suffering can have the effect of winning over the other, not only saving your marriage, but saving the unbelieving spouse. So even in this case you mustn't be hasty

with signing on the dotted line; but seeing how the Lord persevered in love toward his people, thereby saving some, so also remaining married has the possibility of a good outcome. No such good outcome is *ever* promised to divorce.

In either case you must not underestimate the Lord's ability to use our sin for good. We were unfaithful to him, yet he remained faithful to us and saved us. We sinned grievously by crucifying the Son of God, yet he took our sin and used it to gain for us the forgiveness of sins. Remaining married when there are grounds for divorce is an excellent reflection of how Christ acts toward his Church. It's what he did for us, as the ancient hymn from 2 Timothy 2:12-13 says, "If we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself." Jesus is by nature the embodiment of steadfast love and long-suffering, and we, being embodied under him, our head, are being conformed to his likeness.



Talk: Why does Jesus treat divorce as such a grave sin? What are the two "permissible" reasons for divorce? Which reason doesn't apply at all to the marriage of two Christians? Even in a case of adultery, what should a Christian couple do?

Pray: Lord Jesus Christ, when we are faithless You remain faithful (2 Tim. 2:13). You have said Your vows, You have betrothed us to You forever (Hos. 2:19). You will never hand Your bride, the Church, a certificate of divorce and send her away; the thought of doing so does not even enter Your mind. Give us the same faithfulness to each other that You show toward us. Banish all thoughts of divorce far from us, that what God has joined together we would not presume to separate (Mt. 19:6). When sin comes between us, make us eager to reconcile. When times of worse, poorer, and sickness come, draw us closer together to withstand such trials and do not allow them to rip us apart. If it is Your Father's will that we pass through fire for a time, assure us in the midst of it that You have not forsaken us and use that fire to refine us. Grant us a rich supply of Your Word when the sun beats down on us, that we would not wither for lack of moisture (Lk. 8:6), but that, receiving Your Word, we would in the end have a stronger faith and purer love. Keep us faithful unto death, both to each other and to You. Amen.

Do: Each of you take a piece of paper and make a list of all the good reasons to get a divorce. When you're done, use the blank piece of paper to write a love note to your spouse.

Day 26

Inward and Outward



he honeymoon is perhaps the most deceptive picture of marriage. On their honeymoon husband and wife usually take off work, leave family and friends, depart from their congregation, and focus entirely on each other. This can be very good. In your marriage Christ has given you a new neighbor to love and to serve and as with any new undertaking it's good to give your new vocation as husband or wife proper practice and attention. It's also very good to enjoy the gifts that God has given you with thanksgiving to him. Your marriage should cause you to break forth with "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit," etc. So why is the honeymoon a deceptive picture of marriage if so much good can come from it? Because the honeymoon doesn't involve your other vocations or neighbors. It's when you return from the honeymoon and resume interaction with your other neighbors that you get the full picture of marriage.

This is how it is with Christ and the Church. Jesus doesn't take his Church out of the world, but goes into the world with her. In the world there are people suffering in their bodies who have physical needs, and people suffering in their souls who have spiritual needs. Christ works through his Church and with his Church to have mercy on the world in both body and soul. Christ stirs up in his Church the same compassion that he had toward her that led him to save her and marry her. You, as members of his Church, have that compassion of Christ, and it leads you to take action and have mercy on those in need.

Perhaps the most clear example of this in marriage is children. They are in need, they're dependent on you. You care for their bodies by feeding them, clothing them, sheltering them, and educating them. You care for their souls by bringing them to church, by having them baptized, by speaking God's Word to them, by forgiving their sins for the sake of Christ. It takes both of you to care for your children, each of you having unique characteristics and skills that, when put together, make you ten times the agent of compassion and mercy than you would be by yourself. By joining you together, God has immeasurably amplified your shared ability to love and serve those around you.

A marriage must be directed both inward and outward. There must be times, like a honeymoon, when you focus solely on each other.

So you continue to spend time together and enjoy one another. You continue to give more thought to how you can better do your duties toward your spouse than you think about any other person on the planet. And there must also be times, like coming back from a honeymoon, when together you turn your attention to your other neighbors. Most of the lessons up to this point have focused on your inward relations. As we near the end, it would be fitting to consider some ways to have mutual compassion and mercy on your neighbors outside your marriage.

Now if we attempted to list every possibility, “When this happens, do this,” then we’d run out of paper and ink long before getting done. There is no one-size-fits-all set of instructions for loving those around you. Instead, here are some general pointers and suggestions.

1

Focus on your station in life.

Picture a five-foot radius around you. Who else comes into that radius on a regular basis? Family members, next door neighbors, friends, fellow congregants, coworkers. These are the people whom God has given you to love and to serve. He has presented them before you, so to speak. It’s tempting to think of compassion and mercy as having to do with starving children in Africa (and certainly if you can support mercy and mission in foreign lands there is great need), but don’t overlook those right under your nose. Look at where God has placed you in life, consider the needs of those who enter your everyday vocations, and as husband and wife help people in body and soul.

2

Don’t book your schedule solid.

One of the ways the devil can prevent us from loving our neighbors is by keeping us too busy to do so. Keep a “holey” calendar that doesn’t leave you rushing from point A to point B with no wiggle room. A slower pace to life also leads to noticing the needs of the neighbor, whereas a very fast-paced life leads to tunnel vision that doesn’t even register the fact that the neighbor is right there. With extra time you might stop to listen to a neighbor who really needs someone to talk to. You might visit your congregation’s shut-ins together. You might help someone who’s moving into a new house. The possibilities are endless.

3

Set aside mercy money.

As with your time, so also with your paycheck: don't use up all of it. Set aside money each week or month or pay period to be used when you notice the need of a neighbor. It doesn't mean you just hand out cash, but assist the neighbor in getting what he or she needs. Congregations used to have (and some still do have) what's called a Community Chest for such mercy needs. The money you set aside would be a little household Community Chest. You might use it to help a member of your congregation get groceries. You might help take care of medical bills for a family member who's struggling to make ends meet. You might support a missionary, a seminary student, or a mercy effort of the Church at large.

4

Participate in congregational mercy.

It's likely that your congregation has some form of mercy care in which you can participate together. If you're unsure of the needs of those around you, taking part in what your congregation is doing is a great way to learn to identify needs of body and soul.

Conclusion.

As with Christ and the Church, your marriage is directed inward as you fulfill your vocations toward each other, and outward as you have mutual compassion and mercy on those around you. The inward strengthens the outward, just as receiving the gifts of Christ in the Divine Service gives you fervent love for those around you. And the outward strengthens the inward, just as seeing the needs of a helpless world makes you aware of your own needs and drives you back to Christ.




Talk: Why is it important for marriage to be directed inward? What does that look like? Why is it important for marriage to be directed outward? What does that look like?

Pray: Lord Jesus, by Your Word You have made us good trees. You have watered us with the waters of Holy Baptism. You have fed us with Your body and blood. You have nourished us with Your Word. Your Father has pruned us with the trials and testings of life (Jn. 15:2). Continue to grant us Your goodness so that we would remain good trees by Your grace. Then turn us outward toward those around us. Open our eyes to see the needs of our neighbors, whether they be family, friends, coworkers, members of Your Church, or anyone whom You place before us. Cause the trees that You have made good to bear an abundance of fruit that is pleasing in Your sight. Stir us up to love, so that others would see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven (Mt. 5:16). Give us the compassion and mercy that You exercised toward us. Forgive us those times when we're too turned in on ourselves to notice the needs of others. We thank You that our needs never escape Your notice and that You never turn a blind eye or deaf ear to us. By Your inward care for us in Your Divine Service enliven our outward care for those whom You have given us in our vocations; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Do: Find ways to open up your schedule so that you as a couple have time for the needs of those around you. Find ways to free up money to start a household Community Chest.

Day 27

The Rite of Holy Matrimony: The Purpose of Marriage

n this lesson and the next we'll look at the Rite of Holy Matrimony from the *Lutheran Service Book* hymnal, first examining the purposes of marriage and then examining the vows. You'll see that much of what you've learned about marriage is included in the marriage rite. I'll quote the prologue to the marriage rite and include Scripture references and notes in parentheses.

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God and before His Church to witness the union of this man and this woman in holy matrimony. This is an honorable estate instituted and blessed by God in Paradise, before humanity's fall into sin (institution: Genesis 2:18-24; blessing: Genesis 1:28). In marriage we see a picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Our Lord blessed and honored marriage with His presence and first miracle at Cana in Galilee (John 2:1-11). This estate is also commended to us by the apostle Paul as good and honorable (1 Corinthians 7:1-5). Therefore, marriage is not to be entered into inadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God. The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind ('and they shall become one flesh,' Genesis 2:24) is intended by God for the mutual companionship ('it is not good that the man should be alone,' Genesis 2:18), help ('I will make him a helper,' Genesis 2:18), and support ('complementing him,' Genesis 2:18) that each person ought to receive from the other (consider the Table of Duties for husbands and wives), both in prosperity and adversity ('a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives,' 1 Corinthians 7:39; 'What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate,' Matthew 19:6). Marriage was also ordained so that man and woman may find delight in one another (see, for instance, Solomon's Song of Songs). Therefore, all persons who marry shall take a spouse in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust, for God has not called us to impurity but in holiness (Ephesians 5:26-27). God also established marriage for the procreation of children ('Be fruitful and multiply,' Genesis

1:28) who are to be brought up in the fear and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4) so that they may offer Him their praise. For these reasons God has established the holy estate that *name* and *name* wish to enter. They desire our prayers as they begin their marriage in the Lord's name and with His blessing."

Hopefully that sheds some light on the Scriptural foundation of the opening comments to the marriage rite. Let's review the purposes of marriage that were mentioned. Along the way it's interesting to note that, as with all mysteries, marriage finds its best expression in poetry.

1

"A picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church."

Because the mystery "the two will become one flesh" is about Christ and the Church, your marriage is therefore a picture and reflection of things beyond the two of you. If you were married in front of a congregation then you did a great service for Christ's Church, showing her how the Bridegroom left his home and Father, how he presented his bride to himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish, how the two became one flesh, how he promised his love and she vowed her willing subordination, how Christ composed a love poem for his Church: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man" (Genesis 2:23). Witnessing holy matrimony, both the rite and the life of a Christian couple, reveals realities about Christ and his Church in a concrete, visual way.

2

"For mutual companionship, help, and support."

This aspect of marriage is expressed exceptionally well in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him – a threefold cord is not quickly broken." By attending to your duties within marriage you benefit each other and by your complementarity receive gifts from God that you would not otherwise have.

3

“Find delight in one another.”

In Song of Songs the bridegroom sings, “As a lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women” (Song of Songs 2:2). The bride rejoices, “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me” (7:10). She says, “He is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem” (5:16). He rejoices, “You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace” (4:9). Explaining such delight hardly does justice, but this ballad of bridegroom and bride pictures it beautifully.

4

“For the procreation of children.”

This time the poetry is in the mouth of God himself: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). And again David in Psalm 139:13, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.” Your complementarity finds its clearest expression in creating new life, something neither of you could do on your own, but can do as one flesh.

Conclusion.

The purposes of marriage are so rich and beautiful that they often require words with the same characteristics to come close to expressing them well. On account of this even the simple explanation of marriage in the rite of holy matrimony is woven with the florid poetry of Scripture. The wedding flowers may have wilted, the white dress been stowed away, the cake eaten, the picture-perfect day passed. Yet the one who instituted the majestic mystery of marriage, God himself, continues to fulfill his glorious purposes for marriage in your marriage, adorning you with the mystery of Christ and his Church and giving you delight in one another.



Talk: What are the purposes of marriage? Why are they expressed poetically in Scripture?

Pray: Heavenly Father, You instituted marriage to be a reflection of Christ and His Church; for mutual companionship, help, and support; that we might find delight in one another; and for the procreation of children. What riches You have bestowed on us poor beggars! Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever (Ps. 136:1). Since You have promised these benefits to marriage in general, grant them to our marriage in particular. Make us a reflection of Your Son and His Church. Cause us to be a help and support to each other, rejoicing together, suffering together, and never alone. Be the third cord braided and entwined around us, that our union would never be broken (Ecc. 4:12). Give us continued delight in each other as to Solomon and his bride. Continue Your procreation of man, using us as Your instruments according to Your will. Finally, make marriage to be honored among all (Heb. 13:4); through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Do: Sing Paul Gerhardt's hymn "O Jesus Christ, How Bright and Fair" (see *Appendix B*, pg. 118).

Day 28

The Rite of Holy Matrimony: The Vows



he vows included in the hymnal may or may not have been the vows you spoke to each other on the day you were married. Nevertheless, because the vows in the Rite of Holy Matrimony are based on what God requires of husband and wife, as revealed in Holy Scripture, they are the vows you are required to keep and fulfill. Now it may be the case that you haven't looked at the wedding vows since your wedding day. Such is the flippancy of man that we make many and great promises "in the sight of God and before His Church" and then never give our solemn vows a second thought or even remember what we said. Take this lesson as a gentle refresher and let it give you the same joy as looking back through your wedding pictures.

First the husband:

"Name of bridegroom, will you have this woman to be your wedded wife, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony as God ordained it? Will you nourish and cherish her as Christ loved His body, the Church, giving Himself up for her? Will you love, honor, and keep her in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, remain united to her alone, so long as you both shall live? Then say: I will." "I will."

Husband, this should all sound quite familiar since you learned your God-given duties by heart back on day 16. Your unique duties are included in the vows: to nourish and cherish, to love, to give yourself up. I remind you that not only has God commanded you to do these duties, but by entering into the estate of marriage you have vowed to do them.

Next wife:

"Name of bride, will you have this man to be your wedded husband, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony as God ordained it? Will you submit to him as the Church submits to Christ? Will you love, honor, and keep him in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, remain united to him alone, so long as you both shall live? Then say: I will." "I will."

Wife, this should resonate with the duties you learned by heart on day 18. The line unique to your vows emphasizes submission to your husband as the Church submits to Christ. Likewise for you, not only has God commanded these duties, but by getting married you have vowed to do them, whether these are the exact words you spoke on your wedding day or not.

After these promises to do your respective duties, you then spoke what we usually think of when we think of wedding vows: “I, *name*, take you, *name*, to be my wedded wife/husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God’s holy will; and I pledge you my faithfulness.” The first set of vows is a promise to do your duty. The second set of vows is a promise not to commit adultery, get divorced, or let your life’s situation change your treatment of the other. Whether your wedding day was last month or fifty years ago, look at these vows, look at your life, and ask yourself, “How am I doing with keeping these solemn promises?”

All other vows spoken in the Church involve saying, “I do, by the grace of God,” or, “I will, with the help of God.” But in marriage you simply say, “I will.” With no qualification. You said, “I will,” and then you, husband, haven’t loved your wife as Christ loved the Church. You, wife, haven’t submitted to your husband as the Church submits to Christ. You’ve both let your situations in life change how you treat each other. You said, “I will,” when you knew even as the words were on your lips that because of your sinful flesh it would be closer to reality to say, “I can’t.” So why did you say it?

Because it’s what Christ pledges to his Church and what the Church pledges to Christ. Christ especially doesn’t say, “I’ll do my best,” but simply, “I will.” And so in the vows it said, “as Christ loved His body, the Church, giving Himself up for her,” “as the Church submits to Christ.” Christ always does his duty and keeps his vows. The Church certainly struggles with her vows, yet takes refuge in Christ, endures to the end, is saved, and on the Last Day is clothed in spotless linen without a broken vow about her for the sake of Christ, on which day she will finally be able to keep her vows perfectly. This doesn’t mean that you didn’t actually make these vows to each other. You weren’t actors in a play simply parroting the lines of Christ and his Church. It means that you made these promises to each other with a view to the reality of marriage and with a view to the Last Day.

If you have a hymnal you can see on page 275 right under the heading “Holy Matrimony” are the instructions in red, “This rite is

designed for use at the beginning of the Divine Service.” Historically speaking, the day the couple spoke their vows was not “our wedding day” but “the Lord’s day.” They said their vows, they received God’s blessing, and then into the usual Divine Service. They prayed the Kyrie, “Lord, have mercy upon us,” they heard the Holy Gospel, they received the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Bearing this in mind (whether the Divine Service followed your wedding ceremony immediately or a few days later), your marriage was inducted into a life of repentance and faith: repentance as you realized you could not live up to the reality of Christ and his Church in your marriage, faith as you trusted Jesus to cover your sins with his holy, precious blood.

This life of repentance and faith bears the fruit in your marriage of better-kept wedding vows, until that day when you depart with all the faithful to the bosom of your heavenly bridegroom. And in that glorious wedding hall – as members of Christ’s bride, the Church – you will rejoice in Christ’s perfectly-kept wedding vows and will, for the first time, perfectly and with undivided will, keep yours.



Talk: Why are the wedding vows listed in this lesson your wedding vows even if you didn’t speak these words on your wedding day? Husband, what is unique to your vows? Wife, what is unique to yours? How is the original context of the marriage rite a comfort to you in your marriage?

Pray: Jesus our Husband, You have betrothed us to You forever. You have betrothed us to You in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. You have betrothed us to You in faithfulness (Hos. 2:19-20). You have taken us to be Your wedded wife, to have and to hold from Good Friday forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till our death brings us face to face with You, our eternal life. You will never go back on Your Word nor break Your vows that You spoke from the cross and sealed with Your blood. We have spoken Your vows to each other, and Lord, have mercy, for we have not kept them as You have. Forgive our unfaithfulness to each other and to You. Make us better able to do what we have promised and give us grace. Do not give us over to despair, but comfort us with Your blood and with the certain hope that one day Your

Church will be able to keep her vows toward You perfectly. Preserve us for that day. Strengthen us in the meantime, supply all that we lack, cover what we mar, and clothe us with the robe of Your righteousness. Keep us faithful to each other as husband and wife so that we would ever be reminded of Your faithfulness toward us. Amen.

Do: Husband, write out your wedding vows from this lesson. Wife, write out yours. Then speak them to each other.

Day 29

Hyperabounding Grace



do not wish to give you the impression that sin and trouble are greater than Christ. For all the emphasis on the sinful flesh and the snares of the devil, let it be said that Jesus can take our sins and stumblings and not only forgive them, but bring good out of them. So Paul writes in Romans 5:20, “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” When we hear the Law of God we realize more and more the great heap of our depravity. Hearing the Law is like having a thermometer under your tongue and watching the mercury rise higher and higher. You see sin increase.

If we simply left things there then we would have no hope. We would simply have to try our best, knowing it’s not even kind of good enough, and hoping the consequences of our sins wouldn’t destroy us (they would). But then Paul adds the second part: “grace abounded all the more.” The word translated “abounded all the more” in Greek is the verb “abound” plus the prefix *hyper*. *Hyper* means “beyond” or “exceeding.” It’s an intensifier. God’s grace is *hyperabounding*. To illustrate: picture sin and grace in a footrace. Sin speeds up. So grace speeds up more. Sin goes even faster. Grace goes ten times faster. Sin gives it all it’s got. Grace goes into hyperdrive and laps sin a hundred times. In his grace Christ forgives sins. And in his grace (this might seem strange) Christ gives undeserved gifts *even by means of the sin itself*.

Some examples from Scripture will illustrate the point. In Genesis 37 Joseph brings a bad report about his brothers to their father, receives a marvelous robe because his father loves him the most, and then has dreams that his brothers are bowing down before him. The brothers are stirred up to hatred and sell Joseph as a slave. Joseph ends up in Egypt, becomes second in command to Pharaoh, and saves a good part of the world from death by famine by storing up crops in preparation. Among those saved from the famine are Joseph’s brothers (Genesis 42). Joseph eventually makes himself known to his brothers and moves his whole family to Egypt. In the course of time their father dies and Joseph’s brothers begin to be concerned that Joseph will retaliate. But Joseph comforts them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today”

(Genesis 50:19-20). The brothers sinned and in the end they not only received forgiveness for their sin, but God used to it preserve the lives of many and even to give those who committed the sin their daily bread through it.

This is but one instance; there are many more. In Judges 13-16 the Lord uses Samson's sin to create an opportunity to defeat Israel's enemies, the Philistines. The apostles forsake Christ when he's arrested in the Garden and Jesus not only graciously receives them after his resurrection, he also uses their sin to fulfill the prophecy in Zechariah 13:7, which Jesus quotes in Matthew 26:3, "I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." Peter denies Christ (Matthew 26:69-75) and Jesus not only speaks favorably to him and pardons the sin, but also entrusts Peter with the pastoral duty, "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15).

St. Paul persecuted the Church, which led to disciples being scattered all over the place, and the Gospel going out with them to all nations (Acts 8). Saul began traveling (Acts 9:1-2) in order to persecute the Church and the Lord appeared to him on the way and through a series of events saved Saul, baptized him, and called him as an apostle (Acts 9). Not only this, but the experience that Paul had traveling was put to good use, no longer to pursue the Church, but to go on missionary journeys (Acts 13-21). Paul, more than just about anyone, could attest to the truth of what he wrote in Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." But nowhere is the hyperabounding grace of Christ clearer than at his crucifixion. Mankind killed his God and in so doing God saved mankind. If God through Christ can turn such a sin as that for good, then what other sin could possibly escape God's gracious grasp?

Now what does this hyperabounding grace mean for your marriage? It means that you'll argue and fight and sin against each other and in the end not only be reconciled but grow closer together in understanding and love for each other. The God who can bring water from a rock and turn water into wine can take what you meant for evil and mean it for your good.

Paul offers a curb for the common response to this teaching of hyperabounding grace: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2). He then speaks of the sinful flesh being crucified with Christ and buried with Christ in Baptism (Romans 6:3-11). This means that we, for our part, steer clear of sin, knowing that

God, for his part, does not allow his grace to be hindered by sin, but works it for good. That is the hyperabounding grace of Christ.



Talk: What does it mean that God's grace "hyperabounds"? What are some instances recorded in Scripture where God has worked sin for good? What's an instance in your marriage when you sinned and God brought something good from it?

Pray: O Lord, where shall we go from Your Spirit? Or where shall we flee from Your presence? If we ascend to heaven, You are there! If we make our bed in Sheol, You are there! If we take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead us, and Your right hand shall hold us. If we say, "Surely the darkness shall cover us, and the light about us be night," even the darkness is not dark to You; the night is bright as the day; for darkness is as light with You (Ps. 139:7-12). Indeed, You work all things together for good for us who are called according to Your purpose (Rom. 8:28). It is an easy thing for a god to bring good from good. But truly You are God above all gods who can take our sins and blot them out with the blood of Your Son and turn evil for good. Make this our constant hope in our marriage, that we would not despair in the face of our sins but would rest securely on Your steadfast love shown us in Your Son. When we justly suffer the consequences of our sins let us regard You as a loving Father disciplining His children (Heb. 12:5-11). When we are spared from the outcome we deserve make us recognize Your mercy and forbearance and let us never take it for granted. Give us certainty that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from Your love in Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39). Amen.

Do: You're almost at the end of this devotional book. Decide what you're going to do next for daily devotions as husband and wife and have it ready to go in a couple days. If you would like help coming up with something, ask your pastor.

Day 30

The History of Marriage: The Marriage Supper of the Lamb



Vou are at the same time saint and sinner. You enjoy God's order of headship, but that headship gets disrupted. You sin and reconcile. You have sacred duties but struggle to do them. You must constantly be on your guard against the crafts and assaults of the devil in multiple areas of life. You've said vows that are humanly impossible to keep. Is this how we'll always experience marriage? Certainly not! Even now as members of Christ's bride, the Church, we receive and experience the heavenly and eternal and perfect reality of marriage.

On the Last Day the Church Triumphant will rejoice as it's recorded in Revelation 19:6-9, "Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord

our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure' — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are the true words of God.'"

We all have ideas of what eternity is going to be like. Some imagine us with halos and harps, sitting on clouds and looking mighty bored. Some picture a wonderful reuniting with believing family and friends who have gone before us. But both of these views miss the point. On your wedding day there was only one person in the world whom you looked forward to seeing: your soon-to-be husband, your soon-to-be wife. So shall it be on the Last Day. "The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The dead in Christ will rise first and those who are alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air... and then what? "And so we will always be *with the Lord*" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is what earthly marriage pictures: the perfect and eternal uniting of Christ and his Church, and we will receive that in full at the end of the age.

When the Last Day comes we will look forward most of all to being with our beloved bridegroom, Christ. On that Day we will fully experience what we heard in Ephesians 5:27, "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." In this age we are spotted and wrinkled and far from holy, yet Christ considers us to be blemish-free because of his cleansing blood. But on that Day we actually will be without spot and wrinkle, we actually will be holy and without blemish.

So speaks St. Paul when he writes about the burying of our bodies: "What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power" (1 Corinthians 15:42-43). On that Day the old sinful flesh will be put off forever and we will receive bodies — true, human, fleshly bodies, the very bodies we had on earth — yet without the sinful nature.

On that Day the Church, the body of Christ, will process into the presence of her Bridegroom, a magnificent train of white linen and good deeds following her that was given to her by her husband. The angels will sing the hymn of praise to the Lamb and will hail him with high

doxologies as he comes out of his nuptial chamber. Christ will come to his bride and lift her veil and she will see his face shining like the sun in full strength. No more is this woman the infant abandoned in the open field, unloved, forsaken to die of exposure (Ezekiel 16:4-5). No more is she the naked, shamed, bloodied, and lonely young woman (Ezekiel 16:6-7). The Lord took her. He has bathed her and anointed her and clothed her and adorned her and fed her and has now perfected her. She became the bride of Christ and now he has presented her to look the part: no more worse, only better; no more poorer, only richer; no more sickness, only health. Each member of Christ's Church approaches the throne wearing a robe made white in the blood of the Lamb, waving the palm branch of victory, singing the eternal hymn of Christ's triumph.

And then the Church enjoys the marriage supper of the Lamb, with better catering than any earthly wedding hall, live music whose singers and musicians have been rehearsing for this day from the creation of the world, ring dances and harps and lyres, choirs calling to choirs, myriad angels and the bride singing antiphons back and forth. It is the one wedding in the history of the world that goes exactly as intended, whose wedding planner guaranteed its success with his own blood. There's a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. Time has ended. There's a new heavens and a new earth. Sin is destroyed, the devil is vanquished, death is dead, and Christ stands with the corner of his garment covering his Church. What is but wishful thinking in fairytales is a reality here: and they lived happily ever after, into the ages of ages, world without end. Amen.



Talk: What does the Church look forward to the most about the Last Day? How will life be different for us on the Last Day compared to how it is now?

Pray: O Jesus Christ, You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon Your lips; therefore God has blessed You forever. Gird Your sword on Your thigh, O mighty one, in Your splendor and majesty! In Your majesty ride out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness; let Your right hand teach You awesome deeds! Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; the peoples fall under You. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The

scepter of Your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness beyond Your companions; Your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. From ivory palaces stringed instruments make You glad; daughters of kings are among Your ladies of honor; at Your right hand stands Your Church, the queen, in gold of Ophir (Ps. 45:2-9), clothed with fine linen, bright and pure (Rev. 19:8). Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9). Amen. Keep us faithful unto death, that we may receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Give us oil for our lamps, give us faith in our hearts (Mt. 25:4). When the herald cries, "Here is the Bridegroom" then bring us out to meet You (Mt. 25:6). Adorn us as a Bride for her Husband (Rev. 21:2). Amen. Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage supper of the Lamb has come (Rev. 19:6-7). Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen and Amen!

Do: Go to church together on Sunday. Do not stop doing this until Christ, on the day of his coming, gathers his Church from the ends of the earth to celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb in his kingdom, which has no end.

Appendix A

Confession and Absolution at the Close of the Day

Husband: I confess to God Almighty, before the whole company of heaven and to you, that I have sinned in thought, word, and deed by my fault, by my own fault, by my own most grievous fault; wherefore I pray God Almighty to have mercy on me, forgive me all my sins, and bring me to everlasting life. Amen.

Wife: The almighty and merciful Lord grant you pardon, forgiveness, and remission of all your sins. Amen.

Wife: I confess to God Almighty, before the whole company of heaven and to you, that I have sinned in thought, word, and deed by my fault, by my own fault, by my own most grievous fault; wherefore I pray God Almighty to have mercy on me, forgive me all my sins, and bring me to everlasting life. Amen.

Husband: The almighty and merciful Lord grant you pardon, forgiveness, and remission of all your sins. Amen.

Husband: “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”

Micah 7:18-19

Then is prayed the Lord’s Prayer.

Luther’s Evening Prayer can be prayed, the Nunc Dimittis sung, or both, or simply continue:

Husband: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us.

Wife: Amen.



Appendix B

Marriage Hymns

Oh, Jesus Christ! How Bright and Fair

sing to the tune of hymn 395 in Lutheran Service Book

Oh, Jesus Christ! How bright and fair
The marriage of Your children where
Your blessings rich attend them!
What gracious gifts You here bestow,
What streams from Heaven ever flow
In blessings which You send them,
Grant, they True stay
To You ever Lord! Leave never
These two, vowing,
With one heart before You bowing.

When man and wife are married well,
And peacefully before You dwell,
In faithfulness united,
The streams of bliss will strongly flow
And we Your children here below
Like angels be delighted;
No rain, No pain,
Can destroy it Or annoy it —
What You've given
To the pair that hopes in Heaven.

To man and wife, O, grant your grace
And in this holy, blessed place
And from Your throne in Heaven
With loving arms protect them, Lord,
And daily keep them in Your ward
And nightly angels send them.
Though we Must be
Hither, thither Roaming ever
Till You give us
Pious homes and thus relieve us.

The man is like a mighty tree
Whose branches spread so fair and free;
The wife a vine life-bearing
She yields her fruit in holy love
And blest by grace from God above
The family she is rearing.
Gemstone Man's crown!
Husband's treasure! House's pleasure!
Jew'l of honor!
On his throne God smiles upon her.

O wife! the Lord has chosen you
That from your womb shall life anew
Increase the Church and build it
This wondrous work forever mounts,
The mighty word His lips pronounce:
What here you see, shall yield it
Handsome Shall come,
Sons and daughters To the waters
Of Salvation
Finding grace and good vocation.

Be of good cheer, for this decree
Is not a human father's plea:
Our Heav'nly Father gave it,
Who loves us through the coming days
And who, when grief upon us weighs,
Will give us strength to brave it;
Blest end He'll send,
As we're doing And pursuing,
Or conceiving,
Wise and happy children giving.

A time will come—it cannot fail
For all within this tearful vale—
When tears we will be shedding;
To him who bears it patiently
By God's grace shall his sorrow be
Turned into joy outspreading.
Heart ill Be still,
Here revealing Hope and healing,
Christ shall ever
Banish care and soon deliver.

Come here then, O Redeemer blest!
In trials guide, in pain give rest,
In anxious times relieving!
To You we will ascribe the praise,
Our hearts and voices we will raise
In songs of loud thanksgiving,
Till we Shall be
With You dwelling And fulfilling
Your will ever,
And our song shall falter never.

Paul Gerhardt, 1607-1676

Translated by John Kelly, *Paul Gerhardt's Spiritual Songs*, 1867

Altered by Matthew Carver, 2008

O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright

*sing to the tune of hymn 595 in Lutheran Service Book
based on Psalm 45*

O morning star, how fair and bright
Thou beamest forth in truth and light!
O Sovereign meek and lowly!
Thou Root of Jesse, David's Son,
My King and Bridegroom, Thou hast won
My heart to love Thee solely!
Lovely art Thou, fair and glorious,
All victorious, Rich in blessing,
Rule and might o'er all possessing.

O King high-born, Pearl dearly won,
True Son of God and Mary's Son,
Crown of exceeding glory!
My heart calls Thee a Lily, Lord,
Pure milk and honey is Thy Word,
Thy sweetest Gospel-story.
Rose of Sharon, hail! hosanna!
Heavenly Manna, Feed us ever;
Lord; I can forget Thee never!

Clear Jasper, Ruby fervent red,
Deep, deep into my heart now shed
Thy love's pure fire forever;
Fill me with joy, grant me to be
Thy member closely joined to Thee,
Whom naught from Thee may sever;
Toward Thee longing doth possess me:
Come and bless me, For Thy gladness
Eye and heart here pine in sadness.

But if Thou look on me in love,
There straightway falls from God above
A ray of purest pleasure;
Thy Word and Spirit, flesh and blood,
Refresh myself with heavenly food,
Thou art my hidden Treasure.
Let Thy grace, Lord, warm and cheer me,
O draw near me; Thou hast taught us
Thee to seek, since Thou hast sought us.

Lord God, my Father, mighty Shield,
Thou in Thy Son art all revealed
As Thou hast loved and known me:
Thy Son hath me with Him betrothed,
In His own whitest raiment clothed,
He for His bride will own me.
Hallelujah! Life in heaven
Hath He given, With Him dwelling,
Still shall I His praise be telling.

Then touch the chords of harp and lute,
Let no sweet music now be mute,
But joyously resounding,
Tell of the marriage-feast, the bride,
The heavenly Bridegroom at her side,
'Mid love and joy abounding;
Shout for triumph, loudly sing ye,
Praises bring ye, Fall before Him,
King of kings, let all adore Him!

Here rests my heart, and holds it fast;
The Lord I love is First and Last,
The End and the Beginning!
I welcome death, for I shall rise
Through Him to His own Paradise
Above all tears and sinning,
Amen! Amen! Come, Lord Jesus,
Soon release us! With deep yearning,
Lord, we look for Thy returning!

Philipp Nicolai, 1556-1608

Translated by Catherine Winkworth, 1827-1878

Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book of 1909, #239

The Voice That Breathed O'er Eden

sing to the tune of hymn 919 in Lutheran Service Book

The voice that breathed o'er Eden,
That earliest wedding day,
The primal marriage blessing, —
It hath not passed away.

Still in the pure espousal
Of Christian man and maid,
The holy Three are with us,
The threefold grace is said.

Be present, awful Father,
To give away this bride,
As Eve thou gav'st to Adam
Out of his own pierced side.

Be present, Son of Mary,
To join their loving hands,
As Thou didst bind two natures
In Thine eternal bands!

Be present, Holiest Spirit,
To bless them as they kneel,
As Thou for Christ the Bridegroom,
The heavenly spouse dost seal.

O spread Thy pure wings o'er them,
Let no ill power find place,
When onward to Thine altar
Their hallowed path they trace,

To cast their crowns before Thee
In perfect sacrifice,
Till to the home of gladness
With Christ's own Bride they rise.

John Keble, 1792-1866
Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book of 1909, #438

Happy the Man Who Feareth God
sing to the tune of hymn 883 in Lutheran Service Book

Happy the man who feareth God,
Whose feet His holy ways have trod;
Thine own good hand shall nourish thee,
And well and happy shalt thou be.

Thy wife shall, like a fruitful vine,
Fill all thy house with clusters fine;
Thy children all be fresh and sound,
Like olive-plants thy table round.

Lo! to the man these blessings cleave
Who in God's holy fear doth live;
From him the ancient curse hath fled
By Adam's race inherited.

Out of Mount Zion God shall send,
And crown with joy thy latter end,
That thou Jerusalem mayst see
In favor and prosperity.

He shall be with thee in thy ways,
And give thee health and strength of days;
Yea, thou shalt children's children see,
And peace on Israel shall be.

Praise God the Father, God the Son,
And God the Spirit, Three in One;
As't was through ages heretofore,
Is now, and shall be evermore.

Martin Luther, 1483-1546

Translated by Richard Massie, 1800-1887

Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book of 1909, #250

O Son of God, in Co-Eternal Might

O Son of God, in co-eternal might,
O Son of Man, clothed in the living light
Of Godhead manifest, in power and glory;
Lord Jesus Christ, Thou sole Desire
That doth Thy longing worshippers inspire,
For Thee alone, my spirit yearns in me:
No bliss I find until I am with Thee.

The field is golden, flowers the meadow strew,
The mountains rise sublime, the skies are blue;
In these the child of earth may well find pleasure;
I too, rejoice in all of them,
But, not content, I want Jerusalem.
Where Thou art throned, thither sets my sail;
Home is not home, except within the veil.

Angelic legions, in Thy brightness bight
Gaze on Thy face; my fathers share the sight;
The God-man's matchless glory is unshrouded,
And from that vision, to the soul
Unmeasured waves of joy supernal roll,
That rise in full and ever fuller tone,
Like ocean surges, to the Lamb's white throne.

Then let me go, — what further hinders me? —
To mine own folk, the Son of Man to see.
No glance will I, of that majestic beauty
My eager soul would take her fill.
Joy even now, and trembling, through me thrill.
I must away! Thou hast prepared my place;
My spirit panteth, Lord, to see Thy face.

Wilhelm Loehe, 1808-1872

Translated by Harriet R. Spaeth, 1845-1925

Common Service Book of the Lutheran Church, #529

See also the hymns in *Lutheran Service Book*:

514, The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us

516, Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying

737, Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing

858, O Father, All Creating

859, Lord, When You Came as Welcome Guest

860, Gracious Savior, Grant Your Blessing

922, Go, My Children, with My Blessing (substitute the alternate
wedding stanza)



Appendix C

Great Marriage Quotes from the History of the Church

What a union of two believers—one hope, one vow, one discipline, and one worship! They are brother and sister, two fellow-servants, one spirit and one flesh. Where there is one flesh, there is also one spirit. They pray together, fast together, instruct, exhort, and support each other. They go together to the church of God, and to the table of the Lord. They share each other's tribulation, persecution, and revival. Neither conceals anything from the other; neither avoids, neither annoys the other. They delight to visit the sick, supply the needy, give alms without constraint, and in daily zeal lay their offerings before the altar without scruple or hindrance. They do not need to keep the sign of the cross hidden, nor to express slyly their Christian joy, nor to suppress the blessing. Psalms and hymns they sing together, and they vie with each other in singing to God. Christ rejoices when he sees and hears this. He gives them his peace. Where two are together in his name, there is he; and where he is, there the evil one cannot come.

Tertullian

To His Wife, Book II, ch. 7, circa 207AD

Translated by Philip Schaff, 1858

Quoted in *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. II, Ch. VIII, § 99

Do you want your wife to listen to you as the Church to Christ? Then *you* keep providing for her as Christ for the Church. Even if it is necessary that you give your life for her, and be hacked to pieces ten thousand times, and endure and suffer anything at all, you shall not refuse it. And if you do suffer these things, you have not yet done anything such as Christ. For *you* do these things having already been joined together, but *he* for one who turned herself away from him and hated him. Therefore, just as *he* laid at his feet the one who turned herself away from him, and hated him and spit on him and resented him, and he did so with much care – not with threats, nor with violence, nor with fear, nor with any other such thing – in this way *you* act toward your wife. Even if you see her looking down on you, and resenting and despising you, you are able to lay her at your own feet with much thoughtfulness for her, with much love and affection. For there is nothing that rules more forcefully than these bonds, and especially with

husband and wife. For someone may be able to bind down a servant with fear. Ah, but not even him! For he will quickly set out and depart. But she who shares your life, the mother of your children, the beginning of all gladness, it is not fitting to bind down with fear or threats, but with love and a good disposition. For what kind of union is it when the wife trembles at the husband? And what sort of pleasure will the husband himself enjoy when he dwells with his wife like a slave and not like a free woman? Even if you suffer something for her, do not reproach her; for neither did Christ do this.

John Chrysostom

Homilies on Ephesians, Homily 20, circa 390AD

Translated by Andrew Richard, 2016

“And he gave himself up for her,” it says, “in order that he might cleanse and sanctify her.” Ah, so she was unclean! So she had blemishes! So she was deformed! So she was worthless! Whatever sort of wife you take, you will not take such a bride as that one that Christ took: the Church; nor one as far away from you as the Church was from Christ. But for all that he still did not loathe her nor hate her on account of her excessive deformity.

John Chrysostom

Homilies on Ephesians, Homily 20, circa 390AD

And the wife, seeming to be cheated because she was ordered to fear, actually has the advantage. For the husband is ordered with the greater authority: to love. “What then,” he says, “if my wife doesn’t revere me?” *You* love; continue to fulfill your own duty. For even if the things due from others do not follow, it is necessary that our duties do follow. Here’s the sort of thing I’m saying: “Willingly subordinating yourselves,” he says, “to one another in the fear of Christ.” What then, if the other does not willingly subordinate herself? *You* comply with the law of God. So also it is here. In any case, let the wife, even if she is not loved, nevertheless show reverence, in order that there be nothing lacking with her. Also the husband: should the wife not show reverence,

let him love anyway, in order that he lack nothing. For each one has received his own duty.

John Chrysostom

Homilies on Ephesians, Homily 20, circa 390AD

Let no one be believed who criticizes the husband to his wife. And neither let the husband heedlessly believe something against his wife. Nor let the wife get unreasonably worked up about his coming in and going out. Nor, under any circumstances, let the husband show himself deserving of some suspicion.

John Chrysostom

Homilies on Ephesians, Homily 20, circa 390AD

Let your prayers be held in common. Let each one proceed into the church, and of the things that are said and read there, let the husband inquire of his wife at home, and she of her husband. If any poverty should seize you, bring forward those holy men, Paul and Peter, who are even more highly esteemed than all kings and rich men – and also how they spent life in hunger and thirst. Instruct her that nothing is more fearful in life than this only: offending against God.

John Chrysostom

Homilies on Ephesians, Homily 20, circa 390AD

And never call her in a simple way, but with flattering, with honor, with much love. Honor her, and she will have no need of honor from others, she will have no need of glory from others: she will have enjoyment of what comes from you. Put her before all things, as regards all things – both her beauty and her intelligence – and praise her. So you will persuade her to devote herself to none of those outside, but to scoff at all others. Teach the fear of God, and all things will flow as

from a fountain, and the house will be filled with myriads of good things.

John Chrysostom

Homilies on Ephesians, Homily 20, circa 390AD

Therefore do not, since your wife has been subordinated to you, abuse authority. Nor you, since your husband loves, be puffed up. Neither let the love of the husband make the wife rise up, nor let the subordination of the wife puff up the husband. For this reason he subordinated her to you: that she be loved more. For this reason he made you to be loved, O wife: that you may easily bear the subordination. Do not fear being subordinated, for subordination to him who loves has not a single difficulty. Do not fear loving, for you have her yielding. In no other way, then, could the bond have happened.

John Chrysostom

Homilies on Colossians, Homily 10, circa 400AD

Translated by Andrew Richard, 2016

Marriage, therefore, is a good in all the things which are proper to the married state. And these are three: it is the ordained means of procreation, it is the guarantee of chastity, it is the bond of union. In respect of its ordination for generation the Scripture says, "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house (1 Tim. 5:14);" as regards its guaranteeing chastity, it is said of it, "The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife (1 Cor. 7:4);" and considered as the bond of union: "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (Mt. 19:6)."

Augustine

On Original Sin, chapter 39, 418AD

Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1, Vol. 5, pg. 250

“*My beloved spake, and said to me.*’ See the onward steps of grace, and mark the degrees of the Divine condescension. Notice the devotion and promptness of the Bride, with what a vigilant eye she observes the coming of her Spouse, and then notes very diligently even His smallest actions. He comes, He hastens, He draws near, He is present, He looks at, and then addresses, her; and none of all these actions escapes the notice, or wearies the attention, of the Bride. He comes in the Angels, He hastens in the Patriarchs, He draws near in the Prophets, He is present in the Flesh, He has regard to the Church in miracles, and addresses her in the Apostles. Or we may explain it thus: He comes by the pity which He feels and the desire that He has to show mercy, He hastens by His zeal to bring help, He draws near to us by humbling Himself, He is present to each generation as it is present upon the earth, He has regard to those which are to come, He speaks of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, teaching and persuading. Of such a nature, then, is the Coming of the Bridegroom. The blessings and the riches of salvation accompany Him; all things which are from Him are full of delights, and abound assuredly in joyful and salutary mysteries. She who loves Him watches and observes all these things. And blessed is that servant whom the Lord shall find watching. He shall not pass her by, He shall not pass away from her, He shall stay by her, and shall speak to her loving words, since He is, in truth, Her Beloved. And thus it is that you read here: *My Beloved spake, and said to me.* Well is He called her Beloved, who comes to speak to her, not words of blame, but of comfort and love.”

Bernard of Clairvaux

Sermons on the Song of Songs, Sermon 57, 1135-1153AD

Life and Works of Saint Bernard, Vol. 4, pg. 340

The third incomparable grace of faith is this, that it unites the soul to Christ, as the wife to the husband; by which mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul are made one flesh. Now if they are one flesh, and if a true marriage—nay, by far the most perfect of all marriages—is accomplished between them (for human marriages are but feeble types of this one great marriage), then it follows that all they have becomes theirs in common, good things as well as evil things; so that whatsoever Christ possesses, that the believing soul may take to

itself and boast of as its own, and whatever belongs to the soul, that Christ claims as his.

If we compare these possessions, we shall see how inestimable is the gain. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation; the soul is full of sin, death, and condemnation. Let faith step in, and then sin, death, and hell will belong to Christ, and grace, life, and salvation to the soul. For, if he is a husband, he must take to himself that which is his wife's, and, at the same time, impart to his wife that which is his. For, in giving her his own body and himself, how can he but give her all that is his? And, in taking to himself the body of his wife, how can he but take to himself all that is hers?

In this is displayed the delightful sight, not only of communion, but of a prosperous warfare, of victory, salvation, and redemption. For Christ is God and man, and is such a person as neither has sinned, nor dies, nor is condemned,—nay, cannot sin, die, or be condemned; his righteousness, life, and salvation are invincible, eternal, and almighty. When, I say, such a person, by the wedding-ring of faith, takes a share in the sins, death, and hell of his wife, nay, makes them his own, and deals with them in no other way than as if they were his, and as if he himself had sinned; and when he suffers, dies, and descends to hell, that he may overcome all things, then since sin, death, and hell cannot swallow him up, they must be swallowed up by him in stupendous conflict. For his righteousness rises above the sins of all men; his life is more powerful than all death; his salvation is more unconquerable than all hell.

Thus the believing soul, by the pledge of its faith in Christ, becomes free from all sin, fearless of death, safe from hell, and endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of its husband Christ. Thus he presents to himself a glorious bride, without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word; that is, by faith in the word of life, righteousness, and salvation. Thus he betrothes her unto himself “in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies.” (Hosea ii. 19, 20.)

Who then can value highly enough these royal nuptials? Who can comprehend the riches of the glory of this grace? Christ, that rich and pious husband, takes as a wife a needy and impious harlot, redeeming her from all her evils, and supplying her with all his good things. It is impossible now that her sins should destroy her, since they have been laid upon Christ and swallowed up in Him, and since she has in her husband Christ a righteousness which she may claim as her own, and which she can set up with confidence against all her sins, against death

and hell, saying: "If I have sinned, my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned; all mine is His, and all His is mine;" as it is written, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." (Cant. ii. 16.)

Martin Luther

The Freedom of a Christian, 1520AD

Translated by Henry Wace and C. A. Buchheim, 1883

First Principles of the Reformation, pgs. 111-113

Now observe that when that clever harlot, our natural reason (which the pagans followed in trying to be most clever), takes a look at married life, she turns up her nose and says, "Alas, must I rock the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores, and on top of that care for my wife, provide for her, labor at my trade, take care of this and take care of that, do this and do that, endure this and endure that, and whatever else of bitterness and drudgery married life involves? What, should I make such a prisoner of myself? O you poor, wretched fellow, have you taken a wife? Fie, fie upon such wretchedness and bitterness! It is better to remain free and lead a peaceful, carefree life; I will become a priest or a nun and compel my children to do likewise."

What then does Christian faith say to this? It opens its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit, and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels. It says, "O God, because I am certain that thou hast created me as a man and hast from my body begotten this child, I also know for a certainty that it meets with thy perfect pleasure. I confess to thee that I am not worthy to rock the little babe or wash its diapers, or to be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother. How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am serving thy creature and thy most precious will? O how gladly will I do so, though the duties should be even more insignificant and despised. Neither frost nor heat, neither drudgery nor labor, will distress or dissuade me, for I am certain that it is thus pleasing in thy sight."

A wife too should regard her duties in the same light, as she suckles the child, rocks and bathes it, and cares for it in other ways; and as she busies herself with other duties and renders help and obedience to her husband. These are truly golden and noble works....

Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him

as an effeminate fool – though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith – my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling – not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith are ridiculing God with all his creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but devil’s fools.

Martin Luther

Estate of Marriage, 1522AD

Translated by Walther I. Brandt, 1962

Luther’s Works: American Edition, Vol. 45, pgs. 39-ff.

What if there is unhappiness in the marriage? Then each person should think, “Behold, God has given me this spouse. He knows full well what is good and beneficial for me. If He had given me a different one, there might have been more harm than good done. The Lord’s will be done in me.” Truly, where these thoughts are found, it cannot go ill.

Johann Spangenberg

Gospel on the Second Sunday after Epiphany, 1542-1544AD

Translated by Matthew Carver, 2014

The Christian Year of Grace, pg. 64

How should spouses treat one another? Spouses are to be peaceful, kind, and in harmony with one another, not despising or being unfaithful to each other, but serving and assisting each other faithfully, in health and sickness, according as God grants. For God did not make woman from man’s head to be his master, not from his feet to be his inferior, but from his side to be his helper.

Johann Spangenberg

Gospel on the Second Sunday after Epiphany, 1542-1544AD

Translated by Matthew Carver, 2014

The Christian Year of Grace, pg. 64

Open the temple gates unto my love,
Open them wide that she may enter in,
And all the postes adorne as doth behove,

And all the pillours deck with girlands trim,
For to recyve this Saynt with honour dew,
That commeth in to you.
With trembling steps and humble reverence,
She commeth in, before th'almighties vew:
Of her ye virgins learne obedience,
When so ye come into those holy places,
To humble your proud faces;
Bring her up to th'high altar that she may,
The sacred ceremonies there partake,
The which do endlesse matrimony make,
And let the roring Organs loudly play
The praises of the Lord in lively notes,
The whiles with hollow throates
The Choristers the joyous Antheme sing,
That al the woods may answeare and their eccho ring.

Behold whiles she before the altar stands
Hearing the holy priest that to her speakes
And blesseth her with his two happy hands,
How the red roses flush up in her cheekes,
And the pure snow with goodly vermill stayne,
Like crimsin dyde in grayne,
That even th'Angels which continually,
About the sacred Altare doe remaine,
Forget their service and about her fly,
Ofte peeping in her face that seemes more fayre,
The more they on it stare.
But her sad eyes still fastened on the ground,
Are governed with goodly modesty,
That suffers not one looke to glaunce awry,
Which may let in a little thought unsownd.
Why blush ye love to give to me your hand,
The pledge of all our band?
Sing ye sweet Angels, Alleluya sing,
That all the woods may answeare and your eccho ring.

Edmund Spenser

Epithalamion, 1594^{AD}

Stanzas 12 and 13 (out of 24)

That day I oft remember, when from sleep
I first awaked, and found myself reposed
Under a shade on flowers, much wondering where
And what I was, whence thither brought, and how.
Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound
Of waters issued from a cave, and spread
Into a liquid plain, then stood unmoved
Pure as the expanse of Heaven; I thither went
With unexperienced thought, and laid me down
On the green bank, to look into the clear
Smooth lake, that to me seemed another sky.
As I bent down to look, just opposite
A shape within the watery gleam appeared,
Bending to look on me: I started back,
It started back; but pleased I soon returned,
Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
Of sympathy and love: There I had fixed
Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warned me; 'What thou seest,
'What there thou seest, fair Creature, is thyself;
'With thee it came and goes: but follow me,
'And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
'Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, he
'Whose image thou art; him thou shalt enjoy
'Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear
'Multitudes like thyself, and thence be called
'Mother of human race.' What could I do,
But follow straight, invisibly thus led?
Till I espied thee, fair indeed and tall,
Under a platane; yet methought less fair,
Less winning soft, less amiably mild,
Than that smooth watery image: Back I turned;
Thou following cried'st aloud, 'Return, fair Eve;
'Whom flyest thou? whom thou flyest, of him thou art,
'His flesh, his bone; to give thee being I lent
'Out of my side to thee, nearest my heart,
'Substantial life, to have thee by my side
'Henceforth an individual solace dear;
'Part of my soul I seek thee, and thee claim
'My other half:' With that thy gentle hand
Seized mine: I yielded; and from that time see

How beauty is excelled by manly grace,
And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.

John Milton

Paradise Lost, 1667AD

Book IV.447-489 (this section written from the perspective of Eve)

In their epistles St Paul and St Peter promote a kind of revolutionary subordination that involves a complete reversal of social values. In the ancient world the ideal person was an independent man, with economic resources and political clout, a self-sufficient autonomous person. Yet in the church this is reversed. There the ideal human being is a dependent person, someone who is subordinate and reliant on others, such as a wife or a child or a servant. Thus the church is the bride of Christ; all Christians are children of God and servants of Christ. The ideal state for the Christian is now no longer to be a master, with legally assured status, wealth and power, but to be a servant, free from enslavement to social status, wealth and power (1 Pet 2:16). Subordination has therefore become the normal condition in the church. All Christians are subordinate to Christ (Eph 5:21,23), to God the Father (Heb 12:9; James 4:7), and to the orders that God has established (1 Pet 2:13). So, every Christian is in subordination to someone else. All are under headship and authority. None are self-sufficient and autonomous.

John Kleinig

Ordered Community, 2005AD

Lutheran Theological Journal, 39:2/3, pgs. 196-209

Commenting on Ephesians 5:23: The wife cannot take on the role of head in the marriage because that would imply that the church can act as her own savior. The present argument is keenly focused on the Gospel. Paul moves very quickly from talking about husbands and wives to talking about Christ.

Thomas Winger

Ephesians, pg. 606, 2015AD

[W]hile he addressed the wives indirectly in just three brief verses (5:22-24), Paul speaks directly to the husbands in at least six (5:25-30). One might deduce that the sacrificial love laid upon the husband is more complicated to explain – and more countercultural – than the wife’s subordination. But when one notes that these latter verses are actually dominated by the proclamation of Christ’s work rather than admonition to the husband, the real reason for the imbalance becomes clear: it is not that Paul has more to say to the husband, but that he is really concerned to unfold the “mystery” (5:32) of the Gospel of Christ, for which the role of husband in marriage is a type.

Thomas Winger
Ephesians, pg. 608, 2015AD

Commenting on Ephesians 5:27: The present verse, by maintaining the figure of marriage, suggests an analogy between Baptism and the ceremonial bath by which a bride was prepared for her wedding. What is remarkable in Paul’s presentation is that the groom himself prepares the bride for the wedding, by bathing, dressing, and adorning her – an action that would be entirely inappropriate at the human level. Christ thus fulfills multiple roles in the ancient Jewish wedding... Through this astonishing image, God’s own actions in preparing Israel to be his bride (Is. 60:9; Ezek 16:8-14) are evoked. Thus, it is “he [Christ] himself” who presents the bride “to himself” in all her radiance. There is no room here for synergism.

Thomas Winger
Ephesians, pg. 613, 2015AD

Commenting on Ephesians 5:32: The KJV, “but I speak concerning Christ and the church”, might be understood to say that Paul is talking about the mystery of Christ and the church *rather than* about marriage. Paul’s intention, however, is to relate the two things. One might, therefore, interpret Paul’s meaning as “but I say that *marriage* refers to Christ and to the church.” One could even say more precisely that the *first marriage* (that of Adam and Eve) refers to Christ and the church.... The full meaning of Gen 2:24 was not clear until Christ came. Now, by the revelation of the mystery, we see that it was never just about marriage; its deeper meaning was always about Christ leaving the Father and cleaving to the church. The referent of “the mystery” is

therefore Gen 2:24 itself, a mysterious passage that has now been made clear. The meaning of Paul's words, then, is this: "but I say [that Gen 2:24 refers] to Christ and the church"... The staggering import of Paul's words is a thoroughgoing reversal of the manner in which the symbolism of marriage is typically expressed. Paul does not simply say that the relationship of Christ to the church is *like* marriage. Rather, the apostle teaches that God *first* had Christ in mind and *then* instituted marriage to reflect what he would ultimately do. In other words, earthly marriage reflects Christ and the church, not the other way around.

Thomas Winger

Ephesians, pgs. 623-625, 2015AD

Ephesians 5 not only contains a most remarkable restoration of the original institution and purposes of marriage as a blessing to man and wife in this life, but it also transcends the earthly blessings by revealing the mystery of the Gospel hidden in every marriage, if husband and wife would have the eyes of faith to discern it. For, each day as the husband loves his wife in a thoroughly self-sacrificing way, he proclaims Jesus Christ to her and likewise to himself as he puts to death the old man and emerges in the image of Christ. And each day, as she submits to his love, as she entrusts herself to him, as she respects his headship, she learns ever more the nature of faith and sees the contours of Christ's redeeming sacrifice in the Christlike figure God has placed into her life. In this way marriage is for the Christian couple a very holy thing.

Thomas Winger

Ephesians, pgs. 652-653, 2015AD



Appendix D

Teaching Marriage

The material from these devotions can be taught in five one-hour sessions, roughly outlined as follows:

1. The History of Marriage (Days 1-4 and 30)
 - Institution (Day 1)
 - Fall (Day 2)
 - Redemption (Day 3)
 - Divine Service (Day 4)
 - Consummation (Day 30)
2. Headship (Days 5-8 and 14-18)
 - Chief Duty of Wife: Subordinate (Day 5)
 - Chief Duty of Husband: Love (Day 6)
 - Headship: Ordered and Disordered (Days 7-8)
 - Provoke One Another (Day 14)
 - Duties of Husband in Detail (Days 15-16)
 - Duties of Wife in Detail (Days 17-18)
3. Reconciliation (Days 9-13)
 - What Is Reconciliation? (Day 9)
 - How to Confess Your Sin (Day 10)
 - How to Serve as a Confessor (Day 11)
 - Restore and Prevent (Day 12)
 - Avoiding Penance (Day 13)
4. Common Marriage Pitfalls (Days 19-24)
 - Mammon (Day 19)
 - Pleonexia (Day 20)
 - Reputation (Day 21)
 - Parents (Day 22)
 - Children (Day 23)
 - The Marriage Bed (Day 24)
5. The Marriage Rite, and Final Note (Days 27-29)
 - The Purposes of Marriage (Day 27)
 - The Vows (Day 28)
 - Hyperabounding Grace (Day 29)

Endnotes

Credit Where Credit Is Due, and Further Reading

Day 1: Some of the points under Talk are from a lecture by Anthony Esolen entitled “On the Importance of Good Relationships Between the Sexes” (available online).

Day 3: The great exchange imagery is borrowed from Luther’s *Freedom of a Christian*. See quote on pages 130-132.

Day 5: The commentary on *hypotasso* and the translation “willingly subordinate yourselves” are drawn from Thomas Winger, *Ephesians*, page 598 and following. See also the article “Ordered Community” by John Kleinig in *Lutheran Theological Journal* 39:2/3 (2005), referenced in the *Ephesians* commentary and available online for free.

Day 15: The quote of John Chrysostom is from his 20th Homily on Ephesians. The quotes in this booklet were translated by the author, but the whole sermon is available in somewhat dated English in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, Volume 13, pages 143-152.

Day 16: The danger of a husband playing on his wife’s maternal instincts is discussed in *Family Vocation* by Gene Veith, Jr. and Mary Moerbe, page 50.

Day 17: I must give credit to Thomas Winger. His *Ephesians* commentary, especially the section on 5:21b-33, was invaluable in expounding the duties of husbands and wives.

Day 19: I thank my father, Gary Richard, for teaching me the guide of giving 10%, saving 10%, and living on 80%.

Day 20: The explanation of *pleonexia* is adapted from an Issues Etc. interview with John Kleinig on the topic of pornography. A simple search of the On Demand archives at issuesetc.org should return it.

What Is Marriage, Really? is a publication of Lutheran Press compiled from two marriage sermons by Martin Luther and translated by Holger Sonntag. It is available as a free pdf download: <http://www.lutheranpress.com/docs/WIMR-fulltext.pdf>.

Day 21: For further reading on the topic of reputation, there is nothing better than Martin Luther's *Large Catechism* on the Eighth Commandment.

Day 23: The preference for "procreation" over "reproduction" is from *A Small Catechism on Human Life* by John Pless.

The suggestion of husband-wife time is from *Growing Kids God's Way* by Gary Ezzo (called "couch time" by him). I do not endorse his curriculum. The theology that leads to most of his emphases and practices is deplorable, though there are a few nuggets.

For couples who are unable to conceive, the book *He Remembers the Barren* by Katie Schuermann should prove to be a great comfort. Also visit heremembersthebarren.com.

Day 24: The argument for chastity *within* marriage was adapted from an Issues Etc. interview with John Kleinig on the topic of chastity. A paper titled "The Beauty of Chastity" is available at johnkleinig.com under the publications tab.

The sub-section on selfishness was influenced by *Defending Marriage: Twelve Arguments for Sanity* by Anthony Esolen.

Day 26: See *Luther on Vocation* by Gustaf Wingren, or a summary of it *God at Work* by Gene Veith, Jr. See also the Table of Duties in the *Small Catechism*.

Day 27: The Rite of Holy Matrimony is from *Lutheran Service Book*, page 275.

Day 28: The vows are from the Rite of Holy Matrimony in *Lutheran Service Book*, page 276.

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