

Sermon – 05/04/2009 am

Profound Mystery

Study Text: Ephesians 5:28-32

Using the picture of Christ and the church, the apostle Paul tells husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her. Jesus gave his own life. The Son of God gave his own blood to cleanse us from our sin. He knew there was no other way for us to be made clean and to live. Only after such cleansing, only after being sanctified, are we presentable to Christ as his bride.

What does it mean for the church to be the bride of Christ? This is the mystery that Paul delves into even as he teaches husbands to love their wives and for wives to submit to their husbands.

Marriage

In the passage before us Paul gives a further reason why husbands are to love their wives. According to God's wonderful design for marriage a man and a woman become one flesh – two become one. Since a man's wife becomes part of his own body and since he loves his own body he must love his wife as he loves himself. He must feed her and care for her because she has become part of him. This is a profound mystery. It is something that is hidden from the world. How can two independent individuals suddenly become one in marriage?

This 'being joined to his wife and the two becoming one flesh' is not dependant upon the analogy of Christ and the church. It is teaching derived from Genesis 2. But the apostle draws this teaching into the analogy. We are separating the intertwined threads today to take a closer look at Christ and the church – notice how they are woven together in this passage. A husband nourishes and cherishes his body, which his wife is – just as Christ does the church (5:29). *For we are members of his body* (some versions have 'of his flesh and bones' 5:30) – and then the climax in verse 32.

The concept of one body is present in the picture of Christ and the church. The church is the body of Christ. He is the head of the body (1:22, 23). We are members of this body. The whole body is joined and knit together in Christ (4:16). It is a living, functioning, growing body. Yet up till this point the oneness of the head and the body has not been brought out. In fact the image of husband and wife in Genesis 2 adds another dimension to the analogy, that of two bodies becoming one.

Mystery

Whilst marriage is a mystery, Paul's thoughts extend to the great mystery of Christ and the church. Church simply means the assembly of Gods people. It has nothing to do with buildings or denominations. You who have confessed your sin and believe in the Lord Jesus are members of this true or invisible church.

You do not become a member of the body of Christ by attending this or any other church. You do not become a member by taking the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper, or by being baptised in a church. You become a member of the body of Christ, of the true church, by believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and in believing you have life in his name (John 20:31).

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the two sacraments Jesus gave the church. In the Church of Rome marriage is regarded as a sacrament based on a misunderstanding of verse 32. In the Latin the word 'sacrament' is used to translate 'mystery'. They regard the sacraments as mysteries. To some extent they are. The grace of God is imparted in the sacrament, but there is nothing magical about this. Besides, it has nothing to do with this verse. Marriage is a creation ordinance but not a sacrament specific to the church.

Paul was deeply moved by this oneness that believers have with Christ. What happens when Christ calls us to himself – no one comes apart from his calling? What happens when Christ sets his love upon us saying 'you are mine, I will make you my bride'?

In the first place he gives us life. We were dead in sin. Remember the picture in Ezekiel 16 of a baby struggling in its own blood. Without help it would have died. But God said 'Live!' and she lived. So it is that Jesus says to you 'live!' In Jesus is life. *This is eternal life to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent* (John 17:3). Jesus is the source of life. To live you must be in Christ, you must be part of his body, and you must be one with him.

You must be born again; you must be born of water and the Spirit if you are to see the kingdom of God (John 3). This is what Jesus said to Nicodemus but he did not understand. It was a mystery to him. It was a truth that remained hidden. Is this a mystery to you? Do you think that being a Christian simply means coming to church on and off with no great change to you life? Do you think it means obeying the commandments and being good?

Some think marriage will be no great change to their lives. They think they can go on living their own selfish life, doing whatever they want. What happens to such a marriage? It is doomed. It will not last long. The wife will say 'what sort of life in this; I never see my other half'. Or the husband will say 'my wife never helps; she is never here for me to share with and to love'. In a true marriage, a marriage in which there is a blessed oneness, the husband will be eager to get home to his wife and his wife will always rejoice in seeing her husband.

Is this how you feel about the one you are married to – to Jesus I mean? Do you rejoice every time you meet him? Do you desire to be with him always and for ever? You do not see him now, but you know the depth of his love for you. You know that he loved you so much that he died for you. You know that he is waiting for you, that in fact he is coming soon to take you to be his bride.

A friend of mine got engaged and then her finance went overseas, thousands of miles away to study. She did not see him for three years. She wrote lots of letters and read letters from him. Maybe they rang each other but this was a long time ago. She did not see him for three long years. It was not easy for her – or him. Some said they were foolish to live like this. Some said the engagement would not last. But one day he returned and they were married.

Jesus came down from heaven. He came out of love for us. He showed the depth of his love in giving his own blood to cleanse us and make us pure and holy, to make us acceptable as

his bride. He has gone away for a while but he has not forgotten us. He gave us his word, the Bible. He gave us his Spirit, the Holy Spirit. These are better than any love letters, better than a phone line or email. He is so glorious that we could not comprehend him in any video phone link. Our glorious bridegroom is returning soon and we will be joined to him as his bride. If you are not excited then ask yourself why?

Listen to Christ's prayer for you if you believe in him and are longer for his return – *that they may be one in us ... I in them and you in me ... that they may be made perfect in one* (John 17:21, 23). What an amazing prayer. Can you get your mind around such things? Just as Jesus and the Father are one so we will be one with him. Paul called this a profound mystery. What do you call it? It is beyond our power to comprehend – Christ and the church being one.

God in Christ has given us all things; he has given *us great and precious promises that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature* (II Peter 1:4). Partakers of the divine nature. What does this mean? Being born again of the Spirit of God we have a new nature. The old nature has gone and the new has come. We are seated with Christ in the heavenly places (2:6). We still have the old body but this also will be changed. *Behold I tell you a mystery* writes Paul, *we will be changed – in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the trumpet ... we will put on immortality* (I Corinthians 15:51-53). We will be united to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Majesty

Jesus not only gives us life; gives us a name. His name is higher than any other. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth. Jesus is even now seated on the throne in heaven. He is there in all his majesty and all his glory. God in his grace has made us to sit with him in all his glory. *When Christ who is our life appears then you also will appear with him in glory* (Colossians 3:4). Jesus prayed that *they also whom you gave to me may be with me where I am that they may behold my glory* (John 17).

Mary was at a party when a prince saw her. She was just an ordinary girl with an ordinary name they few know. But the prince loved Mary and married her. Do you know her name now? She is Her Royal Highness Crown Princess Mary of Denmark. She is now the wife of the future king of Denmark. She is now given honour wherever she goes. She now has a name known to most of the world – all because she is the wife of the Prince.

Do you know that you have been given a name, a majestic name, a royal name, the name of Christ the King? You are a 'Christian'. The world may not think much of that name but in heaven it is a glorious name – and in the end only the kingdom of God will remain. That is why the church is the mystery, the wisdom, and the glory of God made known in the heavenly places (3:10).

The name you have on earth is not important. Your status in this world is not important. In Jesus Christ, in being the bride of Christ, you have been given the most exalted name of all; the name that opens the door of heaven, the name allows you to sit with the king on his throne. *This is a great mystery but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*

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