

In our gospel lesson for the day, the disciples say, “This is a hard saying; who can hear it?” after Jesus talks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. As I mentioned last week, probably those words of Jesus don’t cause us to be offended by Jesus as easily. I have a feeling that we are more likely to be offended by the words of our epistle. Perhaps even for some of you as you heard it today you thought in your mind, “This is a hard saying; who can hear it.” “Wives, submit to your husbands?” Pastor let me welcome you into the 21st Century. We don’t say those kinds of things anymore. Well today, despite the ugly looks I might get on the way out of church, I am going to say exactly those kinds of things. I will say them because they are God’s words and not mine.

In our text, it is hard to tell exactly what Paul is talking about. One second he is talking about marriage, the next he is talking about Christ and the Church. But a couple phrases do jump out from our text as pretty easy to understand, although hard to hear. The first is this, “Wives submit to your husbands, as to the Lord.” Each time I have read this passage to a couple in pre-marital counseling, it gets a reaction. It is so counter-cultural of a statement that it almost hurts to speak and certainly to be heard. This is the age of equality at every point and words like this just are politically correct. And while I grant that it is not politically correct to say such things, it is biblically correct.

The bible is clear. Wives are to treat their husbands with the same respect and honor they would give to Christ himself. They are to submit to him in everything. They are to recognize and support his headship in the home. They are to be helper to him in everything.

The next phrase that sticks out is this, “Husbands, love your wife as Christ loves the church.” And while it might be easier on the ears than the first phrase, it is certainly no easier of a task, and to be quite honest it is becoming quite counter-cultural as well. Husbands are to watch out for their wife, they are to serve their wife, and lastly, if need be they are to die for their wife. That is what it means to loves someone like Christ loves the Church. It means, just like Jesus, denying yourself of the things near and dear to you in order that you might take care of your wife. It is not just getting doors, but it is listening, serving, and sacrificing.

We might spend a good time discussing which person has the more difficult task in marriage, but the conversation would not help us at all when it comes to living it. Whether you are man or wife, God has set out a role for you in marriage. Wives submit to your husbands. Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church. So how are you doing? Wives, do you treat your husbands with respect? Do you seek out ways in which to help him out? Do you develop a gentle and quiet spirit that helps the whole family? Husbands, are your wives, next to Jesus, the center on your world? Do you make time to make sure that you know their hurts, their thoughts, their desires? Do you go out of your way to serve them with your time, your money, and your efforts?

I know that in each marriage the answer at different times is probably both yes and no to those questions. As baptized Christians, we do at times no doubt take care of the spouse that God has given to us. However, if we are completely honest, if we are willing to admit it, we all have failed to live up to the expectations that God set forth in marriage. We have not loved, have not served, and have not always acted as we should in our marriages. We need God’s forgiveness.

But, what about those of you who are not married? What does God wish of you in regard to marriage? I think there are two things which you can do to honor marriage in the way God wishes. First, prepare yourself for your future spouse, if that be God's will. Keep yourself pure and constantly submerge yourself into God's word in order to more and more be transformed into Christ's likeness. That way when God sees fit to give you a spouse, you are ready to play the role God will give to you. Secondly, you can speak of marriage highly and encourage people in their marriage. When someone comes to you with problems in their marriage, don't just throw in another reason why their marriage is doomed. Rather speak to them of the sanctity of marriage and the forgiveness of God which can sustain it. If you have been guilty of not keeping yourself pure for your spouse, if you have been one who speaks about marriage with less than beautiful words, or if you have encouraged your friends to leave their marriages rather than to stay, today you too need to return to the Lord for forgiveness and renewal.

But the question can be asked. Why does God care so much about marriage anyway? Why does he set out specific roles in marriage? Why does he hate divorce as Jeremiah recorded? Why does he set out rules for divorce and remarriage so many times in the scripture? Why? Because God has ordained that marriage would be a picture of how He and the church relate.

God has always known that his creatures need earthly pictures of the heavenly realities to begin to grasp them. So he gives earthly fathers so that we might have some idea what a Heavenly Father might be like. He gives us earthly families so that we might know what it means to be a part of God's Family. And what our text tells us today is that marriage is meant for more than just companionship, intimacy, and the procreation of

children. It is meant to give us and those around us a picture of what Christ and the Church look like in relation to each other. As we see the reverence wives have for their husbands, we are reminded of the reverence we are to have for Christ. And as husbands sacrifice to show their wives their love, we are reminded, given a picture, of how Christ sacrificed everything for his bride, the church.

No doubt, the picture we usually give is a little blurred with our own sin, but that should never stop from striving to put away our sins, and give a clearer picture to ourselves and the world. When our picture is blurry, we simply need go to the one who created the picture in the first place. He is in the business of restoring old sin tattered pictures back to their original beauty. For every time that we as husbands and wives have not lived according to the Words of God, there is forgiveness which Christ won for us on the cross. And then there is the resurrection to new life assured to us on Easter morning. Just as surely as He rose to life, we are made able through His Spirit to rise to new life and treat our spouses just as God wills. And when we do, the picture radiates with beauty to all those around. And for those of you who are single, but have not prepared for or spoken well of marriage in the past, that same God forgives you and rises you to new life to revere marriage as God does.

Even from the wedding vows themselves we should know that marriage is a picture of Christ and his church. For who else can speak the words of the vows spoken by the groom at the wedding in truth other than Christ. On the cross, Jesus spoke a loud resounding "I will" when asked, "Will you have this woman the church to be your wife, to live with her is holy marriage according to the word of God Will you love her comfort her, honor her and keep her in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, be husband

to her as long as you both shall live?” Yes it was Jesus who said to each one of us on the day of our baptism, “Here in the presence of God and these witnesses, I take you, the church to be my wife to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, and not until death shall part us.”

And in response to his love and enabled by his spirit we are made ready to love, comfort, honor and obey him in sickness and in health and forsaking all others be wife to him as long as we both shall live. Because of Christ’s love to us, we are made able to say anew today, “I take you Christ to be my husband, to have and hold from this day forward.” As Joshua said, we also can say, “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” Or as Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life.”
Amen.