

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR AUGUST 29-30, 2021

²¹ *Submit(ing) to one another in reverence for Christ.*

²² *Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he himself is the Savior. ²⁴ Moreover, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything.*

²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word. ²⁷ He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸ In the same way, husbands have an obligation to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ To be sure, no one has ever hated his own body, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will be one flesh.”*
(Ephesians 5:21-31 EHV)

A young girl had just seen the movie Cinderella and was testing her aunt’s knowledge of the story. The aunt, wanting to impress her niece, said, “OK, but I know what happens at the end.” “What?” asked the girl. “Cinderella and the prince live happily ever after.” To which the girl replied knowingly, “No they don’t, they get married.” Ouch. That tells you what some children think about marriage. If only they knew that marriage is truly about living happily. Isn’t it?

Some couples will do whatever it takes to enhance their chances of a happy marriage, including numerology. About 14 years ago, the perfect storm of wedding dates took place –Sat., 07/07/07. Couples across the country recited vows at exactly 7 a.m. or 7 p.m. on 07/07/07. Another “lucky” date was coming – 09/09/09. I married a couple on that day. Sadly, it didn’t last. The date didn’t make a difference. But what’s so special about 09/09/09? Isn’t that “No” three times in German? Nein, nein, nein.

What’s needed for a happy marriage, a successful marriage, a marriage that goes against the tide of boredom and breakdown and dysfunction so prevalent today? Lucky days? Exquisite planning? \$5000 for an hour at one of the wedding chapels at the Bellagio in Vegas – and that doesn’t even include a room for the night?

What marriage needs is grace. Pure and simple. Generous and overflowing – from God. **GRACE SANCTIFIES MARRIAGE.** Grace, God’s 24/7 flow of love and mercy and forgiveness fills marriage with the ingredients for success and happiness and joy. Beneath the guidelines for Christian marriage offered in our text beats the loving heart of a God of grace who blesses marriage with his power, presence, promises.

God’s word to wives is first, but we’re going to address husbands first. Three times as many verses are addressed to husbands (9-3) and not once does the “s” word appear, as in “make your wives submit.” Oh no! All nine verses boil down to the first four words, “Husbands, love your wives.” NOT be manly/macho/show her who’s boss. Husbands, show grace – ***“Husbands, love your wives, in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word.”*** (vv. 25,26) That’s 24/7 grace, a love that gives and gives and gives without expecting anything in return. Complete, unconditional, self-sacrificing love.

This is headship that is so unlike the world’s idea of what it means to be the head/leader. This is headship that is humble, that puts your wife first. Headship doesn’t mean that you’re king/superior/that she must walk three steps behind. It means the responsibility to set the tone for a Christ-centered marriage by being Christ-like and Christ is all about meeting others’ needs/our needs first – whatever it takes. This is headship that says,

I lead by serving. She's 1st, I'm 2nd. ***"In the same way, husbands have an obligation to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife (first) loves himself."*** (v. 28)

Now the word to wives. ***"Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he himself is the Savior. Moreover, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything."*** (vv. 22-24) Here it is, the "s" word. Three times. The world has no tolerance for this word "submission," won't take the time to understand it. Conjures up images of weak, spineless, brainless, women who call their husbands "lord" and "master," are always at their beck and call, declaring, "Your wish is my command." All of which is very, very wrong.

What does God mean with the word, "submit?" In the original Greek language the word is made up of two words which together have the idea of "come under protective care." It's a military term which means to "arrange under, line up in formation." No negative connotation whatsoever. A Christian woman willingly/voluntarily acknowledges that her husband is the God-appointed leader in the home and willingly/voluntarily arranges herself under his leadership – not three steps behind, but right alongside, supporting and encouraging every step of the way.

The model for this is the church's (our) willing submission to Christ our head/leader. Does Jesus make us feel as though we're inferior, servants, does he mistreat us. Not at all. He meets our needs first – gave up his life for us. In fact, Christ himself is the perfect model of willing submission, as he submitted himself to the Father to carry out our salvation. The key to both roles in marriage is Christ. The ability to carry them out in love comes from God's grace 24/7.

We cannot overestimate the importance of grace, of forgiveness, in marriage – in every relationship, for that matter. Because while everyone wants a perfect wedding, no one has a perfect marriage. Marriage is the bonding for life of two very imperfect people. Each person in a marriage – each person period, every one of us – has a sinful nature that puts self 1st. We need a closer look at grace, at the One who personifies grace, who brought grace to us in the form of free and full and forever forgiveness.

For 33 years, Jesus Christ walked this planet with one thing on his mind – you. For the thousands of years before he came into this world in Bethlehem's manger, he had one thing on his mind – you. Even before creation, Christ Jesus had one thing on his mind – you; creating you, redeeming you, and taking you home with him to heaven. But it was those 33 years that showed the full extent of his love, that showed what he was willing to do even for one person – for you. Especially during one week, Holy Week, we see him do everything perfectly, purpose-fully, with only one thing in mind – you. One event on one day that week was the defining moment of your eternal existence, even though you were not yet born 2000 years ago: Jesus Christ gave up his life on the cross for you, to pay the guilt of your sin. He did it for all people, but never forget, he did it for you. And he lives, still, for you! Easter's empty tomb is empty still!

The empty cross and the empty tomb mean everything in marriage, really in every relationship. Grace sanctifies marriage because it's the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. It's the power of God for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. It's the source of God's 24/7 flow of grace which keeps us humble, selfless, serving, forgiving. Because there are times when one or both of you are not selfless, serving, forgiving. Every day. And then people start drifting, growing apart, getting bored.

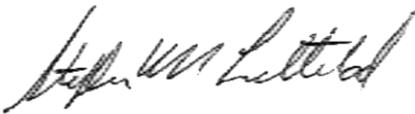
Temptations abound - sexual temptations presented by ever present pornography, by other people. Emotional temptations to focus on career or hobbies or children or other personal interests while your spouse receives leftovers from you. Even without realizing it, you begin giving your heart to someone else, something else when you've committed your whole being to your spouse as long as you both shall live.

There are all kinds of practical, common-sense things you can and should do to keep love alive and your marriage strong, but I want to point you to the most important: the power source for Christian marriage: God and his grace ***"(God) is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power***

that is at work within us.” (Eph 3:20) God’s power gives hope and help for Christian marriage, especially through these items:

- Baptism; to be baptized is to die with Christ and to die to sin every day. To be baptized is to live with Christ and in Christ every day. Baptized people of God – every one of you – have been brought out of the kingdom of sin and death into Jesus’ humble, trusting, serving, loving, joyful gospel kingdom. Remember your Baptism. It is pure grace.
- Holy Communion gives hope and help for marriage. The very same body and blood that 2000 years ago was laid on the cross as payment for our sins is today laid upon our tongues at the altar. It is not there in a way that we can touch or taste or smell or feel or see, but in a way that forgives. This holy meal sanctifies us, and binds us to the Lord and to our spouses in divine fellowship. It not only reminds us of grace, it gives grace/forgiveness.
- The Word of God; the Word provides the power behind baptism and Holy Communion; My two favorite verses from the longest chapter in the Bible (Psalm 119) ***“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”*** (v. 105) ***“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”*** (v. 11) Go to the Word, the 24/7 source of God’s amazing grace and forgiveness. Go there individually. Go there together. Let grace sanctify your marriage.

You really can be married and live happily ever after. Not in a frilly, make-believe Cinderella sense, but in a real life deeply satisfying in-the-trenches existence with those who matter most to you. Remember that your marriage involves three parties – you, your spouse, and God – and one of them can never go wrong. One of them will always be there for both of you with his power, with his presence, with his grace. “This is a profound mystery,” Paul says, “but I am talking about Christ and the church.” And the glue that binds us together. It is a mystery made possible, and enjoyable by grace 24/7.



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