

SS Lesson #10 – Husbands and Wives: Together at the Cross – 26 Aug-1 Sep 2023

Christ in men the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27) is the only power that can truly bind together husbands and wives. It is in this context we are to understand the memory text, that “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27). Christ alone can purify husbands and wives. Nothing else can. When husband and wife, individually, let the word of Christ dwell in them richly in all wisdom (Colossians 3:10), and do nothing without the clearest warrant from the word of God, there will be no trouble. And no one is absolved from strictly following the word, because the spouse is indifferent to its instructions. Many husbands have resolved to love their wives, but have utterly failed. Husbands loving their wives as Christ loves His Church cannot be obtained by mechanical human work. This is also the case in all Christian duties. Men may be temperate in their habits, but they will not be Christians unless Christ dwells within (John 15:5). The experience that we want is not one that will try to produce the life, but the life that will produce right things. “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song of Solomon 2:16). That is the relation of husband and wife, and it is precisely our relation to Christ. “For we are members of His body, and of His bones” (Ephesians 5:30). There is a union between our body and the risen body of the Lord Jesus Christ, which gives us the right to claim for our mortal frame all the vital energy of His perfect life. His life is ours. We ought to believe with all confidence that He is ours, and we belong to Him. “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets” (Romans 3:21). The law attests to Christ and us being one person. Then, when Christ dwells in the husband, he will have the love of Christ extended to his wife.

Sunday: Counsel to Christian Wives – What counsel would Paul give to a Christian woman whose husband does not fulfil his duty to love her as Christ loves His church? In the time of Paul, among the heathen the marriage relation was not that which God intended it should be. The woman was regarded as inferior, and it was thought that she must be kept under. Paul does not start out and say that such treatment of the woman is wrong, and she ought to assert her rights. No! What does he say? “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22); “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18). He begins with the party that is abused and downtrodden, and seeks to get it in the right condition before God. There is nothing said about rights; that is something the devil is always talking about. Oh thank God that we do not need to say so much about our rights. Rather let us talk about our privileges in Christ Jesus. It is the privilege of every wife to be true to her husband and to God, it matters not what the circumstances may be. On this point we read from the Testimonies. “A neglect on the part of woman to follow God’s plan in her creation, an effort to reach for important positions which he has not qualified her to fill, leaves vacant the position that she could fill to acceptance. In getting out of her sphere, she loses true womanly dignity and nobility. When God created Eve, he designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be his equal. The holy pair were to have no interest independent of each other” {3T 484.1}. Here we see God’s plan and purpose brought to view. Paul does not lay down any rule. He simply tries to lead the injured party to Christ to be taught of Him.

Monday: The Church as the Bride of Christ: Part 1 – Accepting that “Christ is the head of the church” (Ephesians 5:23), what Paul teaches, that the church is the body of Christ, do you realise that that is so? Do you realise that when you bring reproach in any way upon the church, you bring reproach upon Christ? It is so whether you realise it or not. It cannot be otherwise; because He is the head, and it is the head which bears the real consciousness of reproach or pain wherever it may be in the body, and “we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (verse 30). To understand the relationship of the church to Christ, and of ourselves as members thereof, Paul employs marriage as the closest relationship which the human family knows. He says, “I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2

Corinthians 11:2). This closest relationship known to the human race fittingly represent the relationship between Christ and the church. In view of that, let us read Ephesians 5:22-31.

Tuesday: The Church as the Bride of Christ: Part 2 – Now why did Paul write this long passage about husbands and wives and Christ and the church? Paul tells us in the next verse, “This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32), therefore, it is not written primarily concerning husbands and wives at all. It is written concerning Christ and the church; and the relationship of husband and wife is employed to illustrate the closeness, and the sacredness, of the relationship that exists between Christ and the church. Therefore membership of the church of Christ is akin to the very dearest relationship that is known to man. May the church live fully up to that blessed relationship!

Wednesday: Love Your Wife as You Do Yourself – “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph 5:25); but do husbands really love their wives “even as Christ also loved the Church”? Is Paul asking an impossibility? Is this simply Christian idealism and wishful thinking? Has Paul forgotten that men are selfish and domineering by nature? How joyful it is to read Scriptures simply as they are written. To accept them in simple faith that what is being stated is what God wants to give to us. How then can a man love His wife even as Christ also loved the church? Paul answers simply: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20); “For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). The joyful truth for the Christian husband is that when he daily submits to Christ, takes Him as His Saviour and believe he is forgiven for his sins, then the mind of Christ is given to him freely (Phil 2:5; Gal 4:6). It is the Spirit of Christ in the husband that loves his wife. Christ is enabled through the husband to show the love of God for his precious children. It is always the privilege of the Christian husband to reveal the love of God to his wife more than to any other person on the planet. We do not need to muster the ability to replicate it, we need only to die and let this mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus. Headship as a husband means knowing that your primary role is to love, to give and to protect. The world tries to teach us that equality means an equality of position, or/and an equality of power. But heaven teaches us that one power flows through a system of headship and submission. “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor 11:3). Husband, do not seek to draw from your wife that love, draw your love from Christ that you may have an abundance to give to your wife. This is the essence of headship.

Thursday: The “One Flesh” Model of Marriage – How does Paul use husband and wife union to illustrate our union with Christ? While we were living in sin, we were married to sin. The law of marriage is that the two parties to it “shall be one flesh.” Our first husband was the flesh, the body of sin. We were truly one flesh with sin. We were by nature perfectly united to sin. Whatever sin devised, that we did. We were married to sin until death did us apart. When the gospel was preached to us, we were willing to be crucified, and we died. In death the separation from sin was effected; for it is by the body of Christ that “we” become dead. We are crucified with Him. The body of sin is also crucified. But while the body of sin is destroyed, we have a resurrection in Christ. We died in Christ, and were raised in Him. But “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). The death of Christ, then, is that by which we become united to Him. It is, so to speak, the marriage ceremony, by which we declare our union with Christ. Paul says, “I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2). Just as in ordinary marriage two persons are united, so that they are no longer two, but “one flesh,” so in putting on Christ we become one with Him. Paul, after declaring that a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh, adds, “This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32). But in this union with Christ it is His personality that dominates; we yield ourselves to Him – we become swallowed up in Him – so that the one person is not us with Christ.