

## **“This Mystery Is Great ...”**

*“... but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church. Nevertheless do ye also severally love each one his own wife; and let the wife see that she fear her husband” (Eph. 5:32).*

From verses 22-31, Paul commands both husband and wife as to their respective responsibilities to each other. The wife is to be in subject to her own husband (vs. 22); to be in subjection in everything (vs. 24) and the wife is to see that she fear her husband (vs. 33). Husbands are told that they are the head of their wives (vs. 23); they must love their wives, even as Christ loved the church (vs. 25); to love their wives as their own bodies (reminding them that no one hates his own flesh, vs. 28); that just as he nourishes and cares for his body, so must he nourish and care for his wife (vs. 29); that a man is to leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and the two shall become one flesh (vs. 31). Yet in all this, the apostle is not primarily teaching a lesson about conjugal affairs for he adds, *“... I speak of Christ and his church.”* The beautiful love which husbands are to manifest for their wives and the honor and esteem the wife is to give her husband serves only to illustrate the great love Christ has for His church and the subjection the church is to yield to Him.

Comparing God’s people as His wife or bride is not new to the New Testament. It is a figure found in many of the messages from the prophets. This same figure is set forth in Jesus’ parables and appears on other pages of the New Testament. Paul, in the second letter to Corinth, wrote that he had *“espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as pure virgin to Christ”* (2 Cor. 11:2). John’s beautiful description of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, *“made ready as a bride adorned for his husband,”* is one of the glorious sections of his Revelation to the seven churches (21:1-4).

In Ephesians 5, Paul draws upon this closest of human relationships to set forth the authority Christ exercises over His church. *“The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church”* (Eph. 5:23). The apostle lists several reasons why the church should be subject to Christ.

He lists first that Christ is the Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23) He had already shown that the church is the body and that the body is the church. He does not, in this verse, cite just “how” Christ is the Savior of the body, that will come later, but because He is the Savior of the body, the body should be in subjection to Him, who is the head. Thus Paul’s command that husbands love their wives. He shows what this demanded: *“even as Christ also loved*

*the church and gave himself up for it*" (Eph. 5:25). Because the church is the body of Christ, He could no more hate it, than a man could hate his own body. We love our bodies and nourish and take care of them. In the same way Christ loved His body and took care of it.

Nourishing and cherishing his body meant that Christ gave Himself up for it; that He might save her "*through the washing of water with the word*" (Eph. 5:26). What a beautiful thought! What a mark of genuine love when a husband gives his own life to save the life of his wife. What wife could fail to love in return a husband with such devotion as Christ?! What wife would not freely submit herself to a husband who loved her with such a profound love that he would give his life to protect hers! We are the bride of Christ. We must love Him who so loved us! To save us; to sanctify us; to make it possible there would be neither spot or wrinkle in us; that we might be holy and without blemish required that He shed His precious blood. Truly, "*Greater love hath no man than this than that a man lay down his life for his friends*" (Jn. 14:13).

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