

## Ephesians 5:22-33

In the mid-50s, people enjoyed watching *The Honeymooners* on television, starring Jackie Gleason. Ralph Kramden, played by Gleason, was known for a number of famous lines, one of them being, “A man is the king of his castle!” These words were always said in a definitive manner, suggesting that his wife, Alice, could offer nothing to rebuff them. “Who says I can’t go bowling? A man is the king of his castle!” “Your mother cannot come to stay with us next week! After all, a man is the king of his castle!”

Now, of course, *The Honeymooners* being a comedy, Ralph always learned the hard way that a man is the king of his castle, but only when the queen is not around. Perhaps if Ralph had known and used the Holy Scriptures, he might have had a leg to stand on. Had he quoted the Apostle Paul in our text for today, “*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of his wife...*” he may have been able to go bowling with the guys more often.

But then, these words were not written by St. Paul so that men could go bowling, so that husbands could put their wives in their place, so that they truly could be the kings of their castles. Any husband who uses this Scripture to justify his domineering attitude in the home does not deserve to have a wife and family.

This text in Ephesians 5, as with every Scripture text, can be properly understood only by viewing it through the lens of the Gospel. Only by starting and ending at the cross, do we understand our roles in marriage and in life.

If you have been to a wedding recently where the pastor was, let’s say “brave enough” to put this question to the bride, “*Will you love, honor, and obey...?*” I’ll bet you saw a few heads turn, and maybe even heard some muttering from those in the pews.

I had the delightful privilege, while in Indiana, of taking a couple through this Ephesians 5 text as part of their pre-marital counseling. When I came to the part about the wife submitting to her husband as to the Lord, this wife-to-be, who was very stout and strong, reared up in her chair and, for a moment I thought, was about to smack me in the face. Her idea of submitting had been shaped by the world, not by the Gospel. She defined headship the way the world defines it. But because the world does not grasp Christ, it does not understand headship and submission; not the way that God designed these roles within marriage.

“*The husband is the head of the wife,*” God teaches through His apostle, “*as Christ is the head of the church, His body.*” And Jesus did not create His church in order to dominate her. He created her in order to love her.

The world has turned headship on its head. It sees it upside down, not right-side up. Headship, to the world, is controlling...domineering...getting all the perks and privileges...having others look up to you. But Jesus demonstrates true headship by serving His bride, His church; by putting her needs above His own; by giving Himself up for her, dying for her on a cross. If husbands today would love their wives the way that Christ loves His church; serve their wives as does Christ; and be the head to their wives as Christ is to His bride, divorce lawyers would have a tough time earning a living.

But we fail. Daily we fail...in all marriages. Not only husbands, but wives, too. Wives fail to submit to their husband as to the Lord. They do not want their husband to be their head. They would rather rule over their husband than have their husband love and serve them as Christ loves and serves the church. And husbands share in the blame for this. If we loved and served our wives by being Christ to them, they would not resent our headship, but rejoice in it.

Husbands and wives fail because all of us, whether we are husbands, wives, or singles, fail as the bride of Christ. We do not submit to Him very well. We do not let Him be our head as He desires to be. We fail to let Him love and serve us.

You want examples? Jesus serves us by taking our sins away...to Himself. But we do not want to let Him do this. We like our sins too much. We enjoy our vices. Jesus cleanses us in the baptismal bath of His blood, but then we go right out and jump in the mud. And then also we have, as part of our sinful nature, the attitude that we can serve our own needs... thank you very much; that we need Jesus more to be our example than to be the one who gets down beneath us to serve us and save us because we are too wretched and helpless to do this for ourself.

What is our Lord to do with us? We have become a stubborn bride, haven't we? We like being independent. We're too full of ourself. We think Jesus needs us more than we need Him. No husband would put up with his wife if she treated him the way we treat Jesus.

But Jesus is not just any husband. He is your gracious God, your merciful Lord. He did not make you His bride in the waters of Baptism and say, "Let's give this a try." He didn't even say, "for better or for worse," but just "for worse," because there is no "better" about us. The best we do is still "worse." "*All our righteous deeds,*" cries the prophet, "*are but filthy rags.*" You and I were not adorable when Jesus found us. We were gross! Covered with sinful mud. "*No one is good!*" cries the apostle. And that includes us.

But this makes what God did even more amazing. He loved you, and found you, washed you, and made you His bride, and He calls you His beautiful bride; and there was nothing in us or about us that drew Him. It was all in Him.

And though we fail in our marriage with Him day after day, He forgives you day after day. He forgives you not "for better," but "for worse." There is nothing we can offer; nothing we can do to make it better. It's pure mercy. "*Take and eat...*" says your Husband, "*Take and drink...for the forgiveness of your sins.*" He gave Himself up for you on the cross, and now He gives Himself to you, assuring you that your sins cannot keep Him away. He draws near to you in love. He takes you in His arms, shows you His pierced hands, and reminds you that you are always, always His beautiful bride, and that all your "worse" is forgiven...all of it.

Jesus truly is the king of His castle. But this King put on a crown of thorns and took a cross for His throne. This is your Husband who dearly loves you. How blessed you are. No wonder you love Him and want to live for Him. Amen.