

Ephesians 5:22-33

If you have ever watched the Honeymooners, a television show from more than fifty years ago starring Jackie Gleason, then you have heard the phrase, "A man is the king of his castle!" These words were never said in a gentle manner. Ralph (Gleason, that is) always said them with fire and determination. And they were spoken always in defense of his manhood. "Who says I can't go bowling? A man is the king of his castle!" "Your mother cannot stay with us next week. After all, a man is the king of his castle!" Now because the Honeymooners was a comedy, Ralph always learned the hard way that a man was only the king of his castle when the queen was not around. Perhaps if Ralph Kramden had learned to use the Scriptures, he might have gotten his way more often. Had he quoted St. Paul in our text, "*Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife...*" he may have been able to go bowling with the guys more often. But then, these words were not penned by the Apostle so that men could go bowling, so that husbands could put their wives in their place, so that they could truly be kings of their castles.

Any husband who uses this Scripture to justify his domineering attitude in the home does not deserve a wife and family. This text in Ephesians 5, as with every text in the Bible, can be properly understood only by looking at 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.

The husband is the head of the wife not in the way that the world defines headship. I still hear gasps from the pews whenever I pose this question to the bride on the day of her wedding, "*Will you love, honor...and obey...?*" A young, but strong and stout woman from Indiana, I thought was about to hit me in the face when, during a pre-marital counseling session, I read this Scripture that her future husband would be her head and she was to submit to him. The world does not grasp headship because it does not grasp Christ.

"*The husband is the head of the wife,*" writes the 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. Jesus shows us what headship truly is by serving His bride, His church, by giving Himself up for her, by putting her needs ahead of His own and dying for her on a cross. If husbands today would love their wives as Christ loves the church, divorce lawyers would soon go out of business. But we fail. Daily we fail. And not only husbands; wives too. Wives fail to submit to their husbands 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 His church.

Husbands and wives fail in their marriages 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 allow Him to be our head as He desires to be. This does not mean that we don't let Him dominate us. It means that we fail to let Him love us and serve us. We resist His love by refusing to study the pages of His Word. We refuse to submit to Him by clinging to our sins, refusing to turn away from them. We fail as His bride by putting everything else in life ahead of our time with Him in worship, ahead of our place with Him at His Communion Table. Our Divine Husband desires, more than anything else, to love us and serve us, but we would rather serve ourselves. We would rather be loved and served by the sinful world in which we live.

But unlike today's marriages which have a fifty-fifty chance at best, Jesus' marriage to you will not fail because He will not stop forgiving you. He washed you, He cleansed you, He declared you to be His holy bride in the waters of your baptism. You were not adorable when He found you. You and I

were covered with shame. We were wretched sinners, revolting to look at. But in mercy He loved you. And He claimed you for His bride by pouring the waters of baptism over you. And now you are beautiful to Him. Now you are His body and He cares for you. He nourishes you with Word and Sacrament. He forgives you.

It may be difficult for us to fully grasp this because of the pitiful world in which we live, but it is true...Jesus will never divorce you. He will never forsake you or desert you. You may walk out on Him, but He will never turn away from you. The day will never come when He will grow tired of you. The day will never come when your sin causes Him to reject you. Dear bride of Christ, and I speak to all of you who are baptized into Him, your Husband took you for better or for worse knowing full well that your worse far outweighs your better. Your Husband is not keeping track of your sinfulness. Your Husband loves you not because of how you act, not because you love Him--because every day we fail--He loves you because in baptism He made you His beautiful bride.

And here's the thing which shows how great is His mercy. He gave Himself up for you, He went to the cross and He died for you not when you were beautiful, but when you were ugly; when you were nothing; when you despised Him and rejected Him; when you were His enemy. What man marries a woman who hates him? But this is just what Jesus did. He loved the loveless. He died for the hopeless. He found you, washed you, claimed you because He is merciful to you.

Jesus was truly the King of His castle. But this King put on a crown of thorns. This King took a cross for His throne. And now you, my friends, you are blessed. All things are yours--forgiveness, life, and salvation--because you are the beautiful bride of this King of mercy. Amen.