

STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD – BY ERIC D. SMITH

CHAPTER 9 - THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

“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. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

– Ephesians 5:25-32

Paul makes the statement about the man leaving his father and his mother and being joined with his wife and the two becoming one. It is upon the conclusion of this statement that Paul makes the comment that *“This is a great mystery”*. Notice that Paul directs the reader to the understanding that this *great mystery* is not really about the union of the man and the woman, but about Christ and the Church. Paul explains, *“This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church”* (verse 32). The true mystery is the fact that Jesus Christ has joined Himself with the Church and the two have become one.

In Ephesians 5:21, 22 and 24 Paul uses a Greek word that translates into the English word submit. *Strong’s Concordance* tells us the Greek used, *hypotasso*, means “In non-military use, it was a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.” It really has nothing to do with who is the brightest or most capable. It has to do with the placement of a certain order or responsibility.

God is setting order and responsibility in the family just like He set order in the Church. In the Church, Jesus Christ is the head, or the one that makes the final decision. Paul is clear that this is not a master / slave arrangement in the Church, nor is it in the home. In a master / slave arrangement, love does not have to exist at all. But Paul reasons that love radiated from Jesus Christ to the Church, and this same type of love must proceed from the husband to the wife for the marriage to be truly blessed.

Questions, Discussions and Notes

1. Although Paul discusses the relationship of a husband and wife, what is the true relationship that Paul is discussing with this great mystery?
2. With the real mystery being Christ and the Church, do you feel that the Church should be submitting to Christ more than what it is?
3. List some ways that you, as an individual within the Church, could submit to Jesus Christ more?
4. Although Jesus can be thought of as “Master”, do you feel like He has established a Master / Slave relationship like we might think of in the United States Civil War era?
5. Do you think Jesus exhibits the love like Paul is speaking about in Ephesians 5? Explain your answer.

Paul writes, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” The Greek word for love that is used here is *agape*. *Agape* is a chosen love to commit to a person, not because they are family (*phileo*) and not because they are beautifully attractive (*eros*), but a choice made in someone’s life to love another. With *agape*, love is not required or even expected. It is the teachings of the New Testament that made this *agape* love the most powerful type of love. This is what makes John 3:16 so powerful. It says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” God did not have to love the world. He could have dispensed punishment and judgment, which would have been fair since the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

This *agape* love only becomes such a strong love because it is a chosen love that commits to a person, not because they are family and not because they are beautiful, but a choice to love and to sacrifice. We need to realize something else about this powerful type of love that Jesus Christ was willing to give for His Bride. It was given before any love was being given in return. Before we loved Him, He loved us.

If you miss the Christ / Church parallel in this passage, you will miss everything about the great mystery that Paul is bringing forth. He tells us, “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32). When we look at the marriages that end in divorce or even the marriages that are dysfunctional and are only remaining because of convenience, we could ask the question of how similar this is to the Bride of Christ not having “a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden” to Christ.

When we read through Ephesians chapter five, realizing that the mystery is really concerning Christ and the Church, there are two observations to be made. First, in looking at what Jesus Christ has done for His Bride, we realize just how AMAZING Christ’s love for us is! But the second observation is that the Bride’s obedience and submission to Christ is often very dismal.

6. Would it be easier for you to give someone what they deserve, or to literally suffer yourself and die for that person?
7. Does God have the right to dispense punishment and judgment upon a sinful person? (See Romans 6:23). Explain what a gift is...
8. When did God’s love for us begin? Explain your answer.
9. Do you think that many marriages end in divorce today because the *agape* “love” and the *hypotasso* “submission” is not present in the marriage?
10. If you are already a part of the Bride of Christ (the Church), how submissive are you in obeying the Words of our Christ?