

Christ's Love for the Church

Key Verse:
***“Submitting
yourselves one to
another in the fear
of God.”***
—Ephesians 5:21

Selected Scripture:
Ephesians 5:21-33
See Rev. 19:7; 21:2,9

ONE OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS used by the Apostle Paul to picture Christ and his church is that of a husband and wife. In this symbol, the husband is pictured by Christ, and the wife is illustrated by the church.

This picture is similar to the illustration used by Apostle John in which he speaks of the church as a “bride.”—

There are many lessons contained in Paul's usage of a husband and wife as symbolic of Christ and the church. He says that the church, as the espoused bride of Christ, is to “submit . . . unto the Lord, . . . as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore, . . . the church is subject unto Christ.” (Eph. 5:22-24) Although these words may not necessarily fit the imperfect human marriage arrangement of today, they do, in fact, properly illustrate the relationship that should exist between the church and her espoused husband, Christ. Christ has set forth a perfect example in every way to his future bride. Therefore, it is not only appropriate, but necessary, for his bride, the church, to submit to his leading and guidance.

The Key Verse of our lesson points out another important element of the church's “submitting” to Christ.

Submitting “one to another” reminds us that this bride class is made up of many members, and they each have a responsibility one to the other. The phrase “submitting yourselves” actually means to “arrange yourselves,” as the verse continues, “in the fear [or reverence] of God.” This means that the relationship between the fellow members of the bride of Christ should be such that, together, they mutually submit to their bridegroom, Jesus, with an attitude of reverence toward God.

Another important aspect of Paul’s illustration of a husband and wife is the deep, mutual love which exists between them. He says, “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 . . . even as the Lord the church.” (vss. 25-29) Although Paul’s words stress the love of Christ for his church, we realize that it is necessary for the church to return that love to Christ. This is done, as previously noted, by submitting to him and his will, and by following as closely as possible in the footsteps of his perfect example.

One of the beautiful characteristics of a successful marriage is the unity of purpose that exists between a husband and wife. Paul puts it this way, saying, “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.” (vs. 31) They are “one flesh” in that they share the same love, the same goals, and the same purposes in life. Translating this thought to the marriage of Christ and the church, Paul says, “We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. . . . This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” (vss. 30,32) This “mystery” is the wonderful privilege the church has been given to become “one” with Christ as his bride and members of his body. ■