

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

July 7, 2013

Husbands, Love with Purpose

No. 3679

Rev. Carl Haak

Dear radio friends,

In our program last week we were talking about the calling of a husband to love his wife even as Christ loved the church. We were looking, at that time, into Ephesians 5:25-27, where we learned that as Christ has loved the church and gave Himself for the church, so a husband is to love his wife. A husband, then, is to look upon his wife as the call to set aside his self and his pride, and he is to approach her with that self-denying love of Christ, to lead her, to direct her, to counsel her, in such a way that she grows up into Christ her Lord.

We concluded by saying that that love will desire that the wife believe that she is treasured by her husband, even as the church is left with the feeling that she is treasured by God, that God's love treasures the church to such an extent that He gave His own Son to die for us—not because we were worthy, but only for His own name's sake and out of the abundance of His grace.

Today we want to continue in what the apostle Paul is teaching us concerning God's word to a husband. In Ephesians 5:27 we read that the purpose of Christ's love to the church was the following: "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." And, if we back up to verse 26 again, here is the purpose for Christ's love, or this is the goal for Christ's love for the church, "that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." In other words, the love of Jesus Christ for His church, His people, has a purpose or a goal. Christ has a goal for his wife.

If, therefore, we are to conform ourselves to Christ as husband, then we too must have a goal, we must have an aim, for our wives. Our aim for our wife will be that she grow in personal holiness and in spiritual maturity. That must be our goal.

Now we need to pause to let that biblical truth sink into our hearts and souls, because that is a truth that we do not ordinarily consider or think about. If I am to be as Christ, then I must have a goal for my wife; there must be something that I want her to have.

What do you want your wife to have? What do you want your wife to be? You want her to be a trophy—always having a perfect figure? What urgings and what pressures do the women in the church feel from men? What pressures do girls (teenage girls) experience from men? What do the men of the church, the men of Jesus Christ—those who are to lead the church and be the soldiers of Christ—want the women of the church to be?

The world makes it very plain what it wants women to be. Men of the world want women to be seductive and available. What do you want your wife to be? What do you want your daughter to be? Well, the wonderful grace of God that conforms us to the image of Jesus Christ means that we will have a clear goal, a heartfelt goal. We will want our wives, our daughters, the women in Jesus Christ, in the church of Christ, to be holy in Christ. We will want them to grow in beauty, in the beauty of Jesus Christ. We will want them to be spiritually vibrant and spiritually beautiful.

The goal is that they be conformed to Jesus Christ, not to ourselves. Our longing for the wife, then, is not that we get her to do all of our personal preferences. Yes, a woman is to please her husband. She is to be the spiritual helpmeet of her husband. But our goals and our longings for our wife must not be based in our selfish and senseless human heart. No, our goal must be that our wife be inwardly beautiful in Jesus Christ. We would, then, covet before God that our wives and daughters be adorned with His grace. The Christian man, the Christian husband, desires that his wife be modest and kind and tender and faithful and beautiful in the grace of God—a woman of prayer, a woman of good deeds in Jesus Christ.

When you are conformed to Christ as a husband, you will have a very clear goal for your wife. You will want your wife to live in the glory of being the daughter of the King—to live as one who is chosen and precious in Jesus Christ and, therefore, in the words of Scripture, faithful in all good works. And to the Satanic influences of this world, to the influence of television and movies and music and magazines, influences that desire them to be conformed to the world, to be seductive, suggestive, defiant, brazen—to these influences and to the world and to the Devil, we say as Christian men: “Get your hands off my wife, my daughter, and the blessed daughters of the church!”

There is a beauty in Jesus Christ. Christ’s wife is beautiful in Jesus. And we want our wives to shine in the beauty of Jesus. We love them with that purpose in mind. Listen to God’s Word. Listen to what God says to husbands: “Husbands, be as Christ.” And here is Christ’s purpose to His bride: “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.”

Why did Jesus die for us? Christ died that He might make us, His church, holy and clean in His blood. “The washing of the water by the word” is a reference to baptism. And baptism is a sign of the wonderful grace of God in the blood of Christ, that we who were dirty and soiled and broken and foul have been cleansed in His blood from all of our sins.

Still more. Not only was Christ’s purpose to cleanse us from our sins, but He had an eschatological purpose as well, that is, a purpose that pointed toward the end of time, toward the goal of all things. Christ’s purpose in loving us, His church, is that He might present us to Himself as a splendid, as a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle in the last day. You could put it simply this way: Christ’s purpose was that we be glorified. Christ’s purpose was that by His grace sinners be transformed to be glorious, to be arrayed in royal garments, to possess an eternal beauty, to come to a point where there will be no disfigurement, no stains. The love of Jesus for the church has a goal that the church be presented glorious at the throne of God, that the

church, in His arms, be taken into the banquet halls of eternity, into the garden of eternal love, and there to be with the Father forever.

Now, dear brother, dear husband, what goal do *you* have for *your* wife, the wife who is, perhaps, sitting next to you now listening to this broadcast? You had dinner with her. She sits at the table with you with all those kids. She is at your side in church. What is your goal? You say, “Hmmm. I didn’t know I was supposed to have a goal.” Do you think Christ gave you a wife for no reason? Christ is working. Christ is leading His bride, His church, to take away all of our wrinkles, to make us a splendid bride, one day to take us into heavenly splendor. As Christ loved His church, husbands, so you are to bear a unique responsibility for your wife’s spiritual growth. When you get married, you must be a spiritual leader.

Young men who are not married, you need to have some spiritual guts. You need to have a life with God. You need to be men of prayer. You, as a single man, are not supposed to be out there floating in waves of irresponsibility. But you prepare by becoming a man of God. A Christian girl is looking today for spiritual leadership. In fact, many Christian girls cry out to God, “Where are the young men who show spiritual initiative, leadership, passion for Christ? Where is the guy whose interest is higher than a good meal and a hockey game or jet-skiing or a car? Where is that guy?”

They are in the church under the preaching of the sovereign grace of King Jesus. That is where they are.

If we are to be conformed to Christ as men of God, and as husbands, then we must feel a responsibility for the growth, for the maturing, and for the spiritual growth of our wives. A married man ought to feel the weight of responsibility.

You say, “Oh, yes. The responsibility of maintaining the home and patching the roof and paying the insurance and making the repairs and changing the oil.” Yes, but also the responsibility to foster and to nurture growth in Jesus, to bring God’s daughter closer to Him, to be the means of God to accomplish that.

You do not need, first of all, a house paid for before you get married. You need to be a man of prayer. You do not need chiseled features from working-out, chiseled features of muscles that make chills go down her spine. No. You need a heart that is impassioned by the love of Jesus. Your vision, as a married couple, must not be the house, the car, the vacations. But it must be that you stand as a couple and as a family in that great day of Jesus basking in the light of the King, knowing His heart.

Then, husbands, our behavior will indeed be that of sacrificial service. That will be our behavior both as a husband and as a wife. For Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. Love, as I said last week, is not just talk. Oh, yes, talk is necessary. For we, as the church, need to be told that Christ loves us. That is what the Scriptures are. That is what the preaching of the Word in the church is all about. And that is a good husband. Through the Word, and through preachers, Christ proclaims His steadfast, faithful love on His elect church. He will never

remove that love. That is why Christ is such a great husband, a perfect husband. And now we, as husbands, must mirror Christ. We too must speak to our wives of our love for them.

But it must not be speech alone. It must be behavior. Love must be expressed in sacrificial, humble, kind, thoughtful behavior. That is the key whereby the grace of God brings change and growth to our wife. When the Scriptures say to us, “God’s grace will give you to forbear and forgive,” that does not mean (as we also said last week) that then your marriage is in a stuck position and that the Scriptures are simply saying to husbands and wives, “Well, it looks like we’re going to have to live like this.” No. But forgiveness and forbearance and the refusal to become bitter and resentful—all of that leads and becomes the foundation to the wonderful power of God’s grace to bring about change in behavior.

What a change there was in the prodigal son, from a thoughtless, self-centered young man to a humble servant of the father. That prodigal son, when he was at home and then left his father, was unbearable to be around. He thought of nobody but himself. He lived and used everything for himself. What changed him? Was it the threat of his father: “Listen, shape up or you’re out of this house”? No, what changed the prodigal son, by God’s wonderful grace, was the knowledge of his father’s unbroken and unbreakable love.

What will change your spouse? You say, “Rev., I can’t live with this nagging, this bickering, this badgering.” One of the most powerful instruments of God’s grace to bring change in our spouse is to lay down our life one for another. To be loved in a sacrificial way, as Christ died for us dirty sinners, for us unfaithful, selfish, foolish, proud, arrogant sinners. By grace He forgave us. And His grace moves us to be like Him. Christ won His church by dying for her.

And so, look at what He did. Husband, you too will win the heart of your Christian wife by a sacrificial love for her. Pursue conformity to Christ. Track it down. Lay hold of that truth and do not let it go—no matter what swirls around you. Let these words be branded upon your soul: “Marriage is a picture of Christ and the church. I must love her as Christ loved the church.” Do you think that was an easy thing? That required all the infinite power of the perfect God. God will honor that type of obedience to Him. And you will find that His grace that brought life out of death in your own heart is also able to bring love out of hate. You say that your marriage has descended to bitterness? The grace of God that has brought life out of death in your heart is able to bring love out of hate and victory out of failure.

Marriage is about forgiveness and forbearance. And marriage is about change—to be conformed to Christ. It is about growing up into Christ. Marriage is intended that we grow up into Him. That is the purpose of everything. All of God’s works have one goal—that His church be like Christ.

That is the purpose of God for your marriage, so that after ten, twenty, thirty years of marriage, there will be more beauty and more delight. And should you live and grow old together, your marriage will become deeper and more vibrant in Jesus Christ. And should your wife die before you, you say to her as she closes her eyes in death, “I will meet you on the other side. And together we will be arrayed in Christ’s glory, the very glory that we were pursuing together on earth.”

Second, we have seen that marriage, because it is to be a display of Christ and the church, is therefore also a daily display of forgiving and forbearing. We are to forbear one another in love, even as Christ forgives us. We find that in Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:12 and 13. This forgiving of one another becomes the very foundation for working on change one in the other. We do not make change by bringing ultimatums, but we begin by exercising forgiving love for each other. This becomes the foundation for intimacy; this becomes the foundation for changing in our married life. Here is another good text to remember in your marriage: James 5:16, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.”

And, third, marriage calls a husband and a wife to love with purpose. A self-denying love is a love that has a purpose. Husbands are to love their wives with a goal in mind, namely, that the wife grow spiritually. We read in Ephesians 5:25, 26: “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.” Jesus had a goal in loving the church, namely, the church’s spiritual growth and maturation, its coming finally to stand before God as a glorious church. So also, as a husband, we are to see that we receive a wife from the Lord as a gift, knowing that when the Lord returns for her, His purposes for her have been sought by us—that we, as a husband, have been an instrument of her sanctification. What purpose, what goal, do you have for the wife that God has given to you? It should be this, that she be holy and without blemish before God in love.

Now today we want to continue our series and hear the Word of God on the role of the husband and the role of the wife—specifically the role of a husband to be the head of the wife.

We note from the Word of God that there are fixed roles for husband and wife. The Scriptures make that plain. The husband is the head of the wife and the wife is to submit to her own husband. I read in Ephesians 5:22, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands,” and then in verse 24, “Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands.” And what about the husband? Verse 23 of Ephesians 5, “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.” There are fixed roles, then, for a husband: he is to be the head; and a fixed role for the wife: she is to be subject to her own husband.

This is so, not because of culture. This is not so because of the male dominance in Paul’s culture. This is not so because the one in marriage is normally the physically weaker one or the one that biologically is able to bear children. No, we do not find the origin of these roles in those considerations. But this is so because marriage is a picture of Christ and the church. That determines the role or the calling that each has in marriage.

The apostle says that the coming together of a man and a woman to form one flesh in marriage is a great mystery. In verse 31 of Ephesians 5, the apostle quotes from Galatians 2:24: “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.” Then, having spoken of God’s institution of marriage, he continues: “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (v. 32).

When the apostle says that this is a great mystery, you must not think that the word “mystery” in the Bible is something that is obscure and hidden and hard to understand. But that word “mystery” means something that is profound, something that God has to show you. When God’s purpose for something is known, then that is profound—a great mystery. Marriage is a great mystery because this is God’s purpose for it. It is to be a picture of Christ and the church. As God made man in His image, so He made marriage in the image of His own eternal marriage to the church.

So husbands and wives, as they are filled with the Holy Spirit, will get down low to help lift the other up. They will both behave as the servants of Him who took a basin, girded Himself with a towel, and washed His disciples’ feet. They will both find ways to forego their preferences for the good of the other. They will both be mutually humble, mutually ready to serve the other. They will both desire to meet one another’s needs. They will both desire to build each other up.

Amen to all of that! May that happen more and more in your marriage. But that does not take away the distinct role, the distinct calling, the distinct place, that God has given both to the man and to the woman in marriage. He has given a unique calling to both. The husband is the head of the wife; the wife is called to be in subjection to her husband. For this is the picture of Christ and the church.

The husband, then, is to be the head of his wife. Once again, Ephesians 5:23: “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.”

One thing that becomes crystal clear as we read that verse in Holy Scripture is that the calling of a husband in marriage is not arbitrarily a sign. Is it arbitrary that Christ is the head of the church? Is it only for convenience? Could this role be, perhaps, reversed—the church becomes the head of Christ? No! The headship of Christ over the church and the loving, honoring submission of the church is the design of God for our salvation. So also the calling of a husband and a wife is not an arbitrary matter. It is the revelation of the mystery of Christ made head of the church and the church looking to Christ in submissive love.

This was God’s intention in the Garden of Eden. Adam was made the head of his wife. He was made the leader, and Eve was made a help meet for Adam. We read in Genesis 2 that He (God) made the woman from the rib of Adam and brought her to be a help meet for him. God said, “Adam, you lead her. You show her the marvels of My creation. You cherish, you nurture, you provide for her. Eve, I want you to use everything that I have made you to be—your creative instincts, your womanly instincts—to bless Adam.

The headship of a man in marriage did not come into being because of sin. The submission, that is, the loving service, of a woman was not given as a curse because of the entrance of sin into the world. No, these were already present in the institution of marriage, and therefore these were and are good. God created it this way to be the picture of Christ and the church. Sin did not bring about the headship of the husband or the submission of the wife. Sin ruined them. Sin distorted them. Sin made ugly what had been made good. Sin made a man take this headship

and pervert it to serve selfish, evil ends. This headship that was intended of the Lord for the growth and blessing of the woman, now, under sin, is used to pervert that good intention.

Do you, as a husband, try to destroy your wife? Do you criticize her every fault? Do you break her down? Do you think that you need to change her to be what you want? That is sin. Does your wife cower before you? Does she feel pressure? Does she think that she is not allowed to have a mind of her own? All of this is sin.

And sin made the woman to bristle when called to submit her will to God and to her husband. Sin made her say, “No, I’m not going to try to please that guy. It’s *my* way.” Sin ruined the harmony that God gave to marriage. Not because sin brought headship and submission, but because sin corrupted both of them and made a man into a tyrant and a woman into a rebel.

But now our Lord Jesus Christ has come. He has come to redeem us, to restore, to bring marriage back to the purpose that God intended, to provide loving headship through the man and willing submission by the wife. Christ did not come to dismantle marriage. He did not come to say, “Well, this doesn’t work—this headship and this submission. There is an intrinsic flaw here.” But He came to recover marriage from the ravages of sin.

And that is exactly what we have in Ephesians 5. We have gospel teaching. We have the cross of Jesus Christ in Ephesians 5. We have here the call of the gospel. We must remember that when the apostle Paul addresses a wife and a husband in this chapter, he is addressing them through the gospel, through the Savior. “Wives, let your fallen submission be redeemed by modeling your submission after the loving submission of the church to Christ. Husbands, let your fallen headship be redeemed by modeling it after Christ.” Headship, then, is not an evil controlling, a forced compliance, so that the wife is cowering and simply empty. But it is to mirror Christ.

What does it mean, then, to be the head of your wife?

Once again, we read in verse 23, “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.” It means two wonderful things.

That Christ is the head of the church means that Christ has assumed complete responsibility for the church. He became accountable for our salvation and for our eternal protection and well-being. The apostle underscores that in the text. He says that Christ is the head of the church and He is the Savior of the body. He functions as the head by being the Savior. In the eternal will and counsel of God (we read of that in Ephesians 1), Christ is appointed to be the legal, covenant head of the elect, of the church, to be responsible for all of them. There we stood, of ourselves guilty before God, exposed and liable to the wrath of God against our sins. All around us were the piles of our smelly sins. And behind us were the flames of hell. We did it. We were the guilty. We were damn-worthy sinners. Christ, the head of the church, became responsible for us. He became accountable for us. He came forward and said, “Father, lay not their sins to their charge.” He became responsible to redeem the church, to keep the church, to preserve the church, to guide the church, to bring us unto the Father.

Second, as head, Christ also rules over the church, leads and governs the church. So, first of all, Christ assumed responsibility as the head. Secondly, Christ rules over or leads the church as its head. Paul exalts this aspect of the headship of Jesus Christ over the church in chapter 1 of Ephesians, the verses 18-23, where he prays that our eyes might be opened; that we might see the exceeding greatness of God's power or authority that He has placed in Christ; that He has raised Christ; that He has set Christ at His own right hand far above all things; that He has put all things under the feet of Christ, in order that Christ might be head over all things to the church, which is His body. Christ, as the head of the church, rules the church, and so governs all things for the good of His church. As the Lion of the tribe of Judah, He is fearless. And as the Lamb of God, He is tender to carry the church through all dangers, through all evils, and through all snares.

Now, husbands, be the head of your wife as Christ is the head of the church and the savior of the body. That means that you as the husband, as the head of your wife, are responsible for her and for your family. You are to take the leadership, the guidance, the rule, aimed at her good, her growth, and the enjoyment of her salvation. Headship is to assume responsibility before God for your wife and for the children given to you—for her soul and for the souls of your children. That is very humbling and overwhelming. We can do that only when we daily look to Jesus Christ, the real Man of God, the One who truly came to fulfill the will of the heavenly Father.

This means that the needs and the problems, the sins, the discipline of children—these are your responsibility. The patience, the ability to communicate, to be in touch with your wife, to be involved with your wife, to pray meaningfully for your wife—you are the responsible one in your marriage. You are responsible for the marriage when God comes to inquire of your marriage. He begins with the head. Who is the head here? He comes to speak to *you*. Do not point your finger and look at her! *You* are the head. Our flesh always wants to abdicate this responsibility. We say, "This is too hard. I am going to go fishing, or something else. That is easier." No. You must look to God and understand that, as the head of your wife, you are responsible for the spiritual direction of your family.

And that head is also leadership. It is guiding, it is ruling your family by the Word of God so that the direction of the home is heaven-ward. You must see to it that you and your family are not drifting or sliding along but that you are constantly going to the Holy Scriptures in order that you might lead and show and instruct and teach. You are to take the initiative. You are not to sit back and wait for these things to happen. As the head of your wife, you are to take the initiative through the Word of God. Talk to her about these things. Consult with your wife. You are to be lion-hearted and you are to be shepherd-like. You are to be a strong and tender, steadfast and compassionate, bold and broken-hearted man of God.

I think, then, that we need a word of encouragement. And we need a word of caution. A word of encouragement to husbands. This would sound overwhelming. We certainly see our weaknesses. We certainly see that our wife is not perfect—just like the church on earth is not perfect. And then, if we are not looking by faith to our Savior and His promises, we are going to respond to this word: "I can't! This is asking too much. I'll just check out and hide from responsibility. I'll be frustrated because she doesn't follow my headship, my leadership." Husbands, be encouraged. Christ did not call us to do something that He does not, by His grace, empower us to do. We read in Isaiah 41:10, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not

dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” The roles and the calling in the kingdom of Christ are indeed humbling things. In fact, if it does not humble you, then you ought to question yourself. But those roles, those callings that God gives to us in the kingdom of God, He does not leave it up to us, but He directs us to Christ for our strength. Therefore, if you and I do not know what to do, we must look up. We have a heavenly Father who has promised to be with us and to teach us and to bless us as we take up our responsibility for our marriage and our family.

So there is the encouragement to husbands. But there is also a caution to wives. You say, “But my husband is not that way. Yes, I want that. I want a man who is going to take responsibility. I want a man who is going to show good, sound, loving leadership of the family. But he doesn’t do that.” Then you, perhaps, begin to list all of his faults. And you, perhaps, become demanding. Well, demanding will be counter-productive. You must pray for him. You must pray that God strengthen him. You must pray that God awaken in him his biblical calling.

The apostle concludes Ephesians 5 with these words, “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband” (v. 33). Speak to your husband with a sense of hope grounded in the Word of God. And direct your husband to his God, your God, the heavenly Father who will certainly bless and be near to every son to whom He has given this responsibility.

Until next time, may God bless this Word to our hearts. Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word. It is indeed Thy Word. It is a Word that we cannot keep of ourselves. We look to Thee for the spirit of wisdom and fortitude and we pray that we might be men of God, responsible as heads and also leaders of our homes. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

July 21, 2013

To Protect and Provide

No. 3681

Rev. Carl Haak

Dear Radio Friends,

Marriage is given by God to be a picture of Christ and the church. We cannot say that too often. We cannot remind ourselves of that too much.

Marriage is to be a picture of Christ and the church. We have seen that marriage, therefore, is built upon forgiving grace to each other. We have seen that marriage, therefore, has fixed roles. If it is to be a picture of Christ and the church, then the husband must be as Christ and the wife must be as the church. The calling of a husband, we saw in the last message of this series, was to be the head of his wife. From the Scriptures we learn that there are two key concepts in the headship of Christ over the church. Those concepts are: 1) that Christ, joyfully and in love, takes responsibility for His church; and 2) that Christ is the One who has the authority, that is, He rules and guides His church out of His heart of love.

So a husband is to become responsible before God for the direction, for the good, of his wife and of his family in marriage. And he is also, then, to provide that leadership, that guidance, out of the Word of God for his family and for his wife.

The apostle speaks of all of this in Ephesians 5:23, where we read, “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.” There the apostle says to us that that headship of Christ is seen concretely in two ways. Those two ways are that Christ protects and Christ provides for His bride, the church. Christ’s leadership, which is His responsibility and His guidance of the church, takes these forms: He protects and He provides. As Christ is the Husband of the church, so also must a husband protect and provide for his wife and family.

Christ, as the head of the church, protects His bride. We read in Ephesians 5:25 that He gave Himself for the church. Jesus said in John 10, “I lay down my life for the sheep.” And in John 18, “If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: that the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me, have I lost none.” As the head of the church, Jesus Christ protects His bride. He delivered us from the utter ruin and death that was ours by placing Himself in between us and our judgment, in order that we through Him might be reconciled unto God. And He not only did this upon the cross, but He ever lives to continue this protection of the church, for He is the head of the church. Therefore He is able to say concerning His wife, concerning the church, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Or, as we read in Psalm 121, “He, the Lord of the church, never slumbers, never sleeps; He that keepeth Israel keeps Israel day by day. The Lord is our keeper, the Lord will maintain and preserve His people.” His love means that He brings the needed rescue from sin and the necessary defense that His church requires in this world. So Christ, as the head, protects His church.

But as the head, Christ also provides. The apostle Paul says that this aspect of Christ’s headship over the church is to be expressed in these words (v. 29): “No man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.” As the head, Christ provides for the church by nourishing the church. He does what a parent does for a child—He feeds, He provides. And He cherishes the church. That word “cherish,” as it is used in verse 29 of Ephesians 5, is used there and in only one other place (I Thess. 2:7), where the apostle says that, as a nurse cherishes her children, so were we among you Thessalonians—that is, we exercised a tender, loving care. Christ has a compassionate, tender, heartfelt care for His church. As the head of the church, Christ protects and provides for the church.

Why these two? Because without these two the life of the church is threatened. Because without these two the church cannot exist. If Christ does not protect us; if Christ does not assume responsibility to stand between us and the punishment that our sins deserve; and if Christ does not faithfully provide and nourish us with spiritual life—if He does not do that, we will perish! We, the church, are not autonomous. We are not nuclear-powered, we are not self-sustaining and self-supporting. We are sheep. We are defenseless. We need One to protect and to provide.

So, as the head of the church, Jesus Christ provides and protects.

Now, husband, God has made you to be the head of your wife. As Christ is the head of the church, so must you be the head of your wife, to protect and to provide. If we fail in these two callings (to protect and to provide), there will be nothing left for us to be the head of. A husband's headship, his leadership, his responsibility is expressed in his providing for and protecting his wife and family in both the spiritual and physical senses. The calling, then, of a husband as the head of his wife is to provide for her and the children both physically and spiritually.

First of all, to provide physically. The primary responsibility of a husband is to be the breadwinner, as the head of his wife. Yes, the wife may help make ends meet at times. But Scripture sees the wife's primary calling as a homemaker and a manager of the home. Yes, husbands, you may share in her domestic labors. You may learn to help her out in her duties in the home and all of those many things that come before her. You may certainly help her. But the heart of a husband is a heart that longs to provide. That means that as a husband we will position ourselves, we will lay down our lives, in order that we might put bread on the table, to provide for the physical needs of our wife and family. Maybe a man, you say, is disabled. Or maybe he is temporarily in school. Nevertheless, his heart, as it is indwelt by Christ, wants to provide, and his heart moves his body and moves his use of his talents and mind so that he might provide for his wife. And he prays, "Lord, help me. Bless my labors."

Secondly, as a husband we are to provide spiritually. You can provide spiritually for your wife, as the head of your wife, only if you are growing spiritually yourself. You can provide for her spiritually only if you are daily feeding your own soul. If you have ever flown on an airplane and actually listened to the stewardess before the take-off as she explains various things and talks to you about the oxygen mask, you will remember that she says that, in case of emergency, this oxygen mask will drop down before you, and if you have a child with you, you must put your mask on first and then the child's. That is the way it goes also in spiritual life. You have to take care of your spiritual life first. That is why the devil wants you, as a husband, to sin. Because your spiritual life affects the whole family. Your sin, your guilt, your unfaithfulness—who will be affected by all of that? Just you? Do not believe that lie of the devil. When you are made the head of your wife, when you are the head of the family, your spiritual life affects your entire family. You must believe that your own spiritual life is the best gift that you can give to the family. Your maintaining your own spiritual walk with the Lord is the best thing that you can ever do for your family. You must understand that your pride and your impenitence and your waywardness and your toying with sin will bring woe upon your family. As a spiritual provider, take care of yourself.

But, then, as the spiritual provider, you gather your family together for worship, for worship under the Word of God, for prayer, and for family worship. You see to it that your family attends a faithful, biblical church, where the gospel of Jesus Christ and His powerful saving grace is proclaimed. And then you also organize your family time of worship. You take the initiative. You say, “But I don’t know how. I don’t have any background in this. I don’t know really what to do. What do you mean—family devotions at the meal table? What do you mean?” Well, ask your brothers in the church of Jesus Christ. Ask the elders of the church, or ask your wife! You say, “Well, my wife is smarter than I am. She could really do this better than I.” No, brother, this is *your* calling. See that your family reads the Bible each day and prays each day and goes to a faithful church twice on the Lord’s Day and discusses spiritual issues. And see to it that your spiritual life is always an example for them to follow. That is what it means to be the head of your family.

But the leadership is not only for the physical and spiritual *provision* for your family, but it is also for the physical and spiritual *protection* of your family.

I would like to emphasize here the spiritual, that you are spiritually to protect your family. Yes, there is a physical side to this protection. You do not say, as a husband, when your wife and children are in the car and you are on the way to church on Sunday morning, and you get a flat tire and you pull over to the side of the road, “Well, I changed the last one. It’s your turn.” You do not say that. You get out there and you change the tire. You are the head, you are her husband. You are to lay down your life, physically, for your wife. You are to be considerate. You are to open the door for her. And you are to teach your sons to be considerate to women. Physically you are to honor them.

But above all, we are to honor them spiritually. We are to protect our wife and family spiritually. There are spiritual threats coming at our homes from all sides. There are bombs and terrorists, there are the wiles of the devil, there are the powers of darkness. We need men, we need warriors, we need men of courage and discernment for the spiritual protection of our wives and family.

How do we do that? 1) Pray. Pray for your wife and children every day, over and over and over again in the day. “Lord,” you pray, “lead them in paths of righteousness. Protect them from temptations. Draw them unto Thee in all of their perplexities.” You are the high priest of your family. You are to call down God’s blessing upon them. You are to pray for your wife and for your children in their daily needs.

2) You protect your family spiritually by setting the standards for your wife and family. You make things happen in the moral sphere. You protect them. You take the leadership. What is watched on the television? What music is heard in your families? What is going on in the life of your teenager? Your teenage daughter needs you as a father. She needs you in dress. You do not simply say, “Well, let the wife take care of that.” No, she needs you to celebrate with her when she gets it right and she looks modest. And she needs you to say to her, “You’re not going out of the house dressed like that.”

And your wife ought to be able to say, “Go talk to your Dad about boys.” Girls sometimes simply do not get it. They do not understand the way boys are wired to see and to lust. They think that they are being cute. You are the one who must talk to your daughter about these things.

You must protect your family. You must protect your family by allowing no unresolved anger in your family. We read in Ephesians 4:26, “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” There are intruders that come into our home. There are arsonists that want to burn it down. There is the devil who wishes to get into our bedroom. You ask, “How does that happen?” That is when anger, or unresolved conflict, comes into your home and you do not deal with it. You are the head. It means that you have to go up to the room of your son, and you have to deal with the things that are making him angry. Maybe you need to apologize. Maybe you need to say, “Son, the way I responded was not correct. But, nevertheless, this is what I want you to understand.” Perhaps you need to talk with your wife before you go to sleep. You say, “But it’s her fault.” And then maybe you say, “Because she is at fault, my head is hitting the pillow tonight and I’m not going to do anything about it.” Is that the way Christ treats His wife? How many times has He come to you? The fault is yours—all yours, is it not? It is not Christ’s. Yet He comes to you. Do not let anger into your home. Protect your home. Be clothed with humility and wisdom.

I know, this does not always work perfectly. A son and a daughter may be unwilling to humble themselves. But you must try. You must lead. You must pray. For, as the head of your wife, you are accountable to God.

That is where this word leaves us. The husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church.

Now, what do you hear there? Are you hearing this: “She’s supposed to do what I say, and that means I am supposed to be served”? If that’s what you’re hearing, then you are hearing through your flesh, but not through the Spirit. When you hear that Word of God, you will hear this: “God gave me my wife and children in His love and wisdom so that, with all the gifts that He has given me, I might lead them in ways that are pleasing to Him, in order that I might always be ready to answer my God for what I have done with my wife and my children.” This humbles us. This shows us our need to be constantly following our Lord Jesus Christ in faith.

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, God came and said (now remember, Eve had sinned first), “Adam, where are you? What happened, Adam? You are the head. Where are you?” So also when there are problems in your marriage and in your home, God comes and He says, “Husband, where are you? Is there something not right in your home?” Maybe God has an issue with your wife. Maybe your wife is indeed at fault. Or maybe it is with your kids—your teenagers are indeed at fault. I can assure you that, when God comes to your house tonight to deal with those issues of your wife and your teenagers, the very first question He is going to ask is: “Is the man of the house at home? Where are you? You are the head.”

Let this be an encouragement to us. For God designed marriage this way. He did it for His own glory and for our good and He will give grace, always. He delights in using the weakest of means for His good.

So, man of God, you who are chosen and redeemed by His mighty grace, here is your calling from the Master Jesus Christ: Joyfully bear the responsibility of your family. Lead your wife and children for their spiritual well-being. Heal discord. Lay down your life for them. Your wife and your children will thank God for you. And God will be pleased in you.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy Holy Word. We pray again that it may enter into our hearts by the work of Thy Holy Spirit. We pray that, as husbands, we may take up our calling before Thee both to protect and to provide for our families, in order that Thy name might be honored by us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

July 28, 2013 Wives, Be Subject to Your Own Husband

No. 3682

Rev. Carl Haak

Dear Radio Friends,

Today we return to our series of messages on marriage, the family, and the covenant of God. We look into the Word of God today in Ephesians 5:22-24, where we read: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing."

Marriage is to be a picture of Christ and the church. We cannot say that too often. We cannot emphasize that too strongly to our souls. I cannot remind you of that as a husband or a wife too often. You cannot hear that too much.

The apostle Paul, in Ephesians 5, we have seen, says to us that this is a great mystery, that is, a man and a woman joined together in the bond of marriage as one flesh. But he goes on to say, "But I speak concerning Christ and the church." In other words, Paul says, I'm telling you that God intends marriage to display, to mirror, to promote, the thing that is most dear to His heart: Christ and the church. We do not, then, want our marriage to lie to the world. We want it to tell the truth. Thus we need grace to be fitted as a husband and as a wife.

Shall we allow remarriage while one's spouse lives? Is this a picture of Christ and the church, of Christ who never forsakes His wife for another? God forbid!

Shall there be sex before marriage? Is this a picture of the commitment that Christ makes to one woman, to His church?

Shall there be such a thing as homosexual or lesbian marriage? Is this a picture of Christ and the church? God forbid!

We want our marriage, the marriage of one man and one woman under God, and in faith in God, to be a picture of Christ and the church. And if that is to be the case, then the Word of God says there are fixed roles that are given for marriage in order that marriage may, indeed, be this picture of Christ and the church. We have looked into the role, or the calling, of the headship of the husband. And we saw that this calls a man to accountability, to leadership, and to sacrifice to provide for and to protect his wife and family.

Today we want to focus on the meaning of the wife's submission to her husband, for the Scriptures say (Eph. 5:22-24) that the calling of the wife is to "submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing."

Now I am very desirous in the Lord Jesus that we, both married and single, young and old, young adult or child, hear this Word of God as a call to something that is strong, noble, good, dignified, and worthy of a woman's highest spiritual efforts. The Scriptures say, "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). Our society, and many in the church-world, despise or simply ignore this Word of God that calls women to submit to their own husbands. It is especially that word "submit" that is called degrading, abusive, unequal, demeaning. Many will simply write this off as the sub-Christian culture or the sub-Christian values left over from the culture of the first century. And there are others, on the other side, who will distort this Word of God. There will be men who believe that their wife cannot go from one room to the next without their permission and, therefore, distort this Word of God with sinful abuse or tyranny.

But the truth of submission, the submission of a wife to her husband, is the will of God. It is therefore something beautiful, good, and dignified. It has the mark of Christ's majesty upon it. It is part of the wonderful and profound display to the world of the grace of God. It is good and beautiful. For, listen: "As the church," says the apostle, "is subject to Christ; so let the wife be to her own husband in every thing." The submission of the church to Christ is something that is good and beautiful.

Submission, according to God's Word, is a beautiful grace given by God. It is a heart issue, fundamentally. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husband. The word "submit" means "to place under, to defer, to come under the will of another." It is always first to come under the will of God. Submission, the grace of submission, is that grace whereby we bow our knee, as the apostle says in Ephesians 3:14, to our God and Savior, whereby we kiss the scepter in the hand

of our Lord, who sits upon God's throne. Submission means that I make my will, by God's grace, and my abilities, to serve the purpose that God has given to me in this life. It is a grace. By nature, the apostle says, we are self-willed (II Pet. 2:10). And then, describing us according to the flesh, the apostle says that we are always presumptuous, self-willed. "They are not afraid to speak evil of dignities [or authority]." In other words, by nature we are rebellious. We place ourselves upon the throne of our own heart.

So the Bible sees that submission to God is, in reality, an evidence of His wonderful grace. It is liberation from the tyranny of my sinful self. He, says the psalmist, hath made me free, free to submit, free to serve, free to follow not my will but the will of God.

Now, wives, submit. In your heart, with an eye to God, recognize that Christ calls you to come under the husband that God has appointed as your spiritual leader. The Bible says now that this is something honorable and that it belongs to the calling of every Christian wife. It is dignified, it is not demeaning. Christ also has humbled Himself and has submitted to the will of His heavenly Father in our redemption. He has laid aside His own rights. It is part of the noble calling that we have that we, as the children of God, submit ourselves always to the will of God and submit ourselves one to another, seeking not our own but the things that will edify and bless and benefit one another as fellow members of the grace of God.

Now, to submit, as a wife, at its simplest meaning, means to recognize that God has given you a head, your husband, and to follow his leadership. Because we are sinful—sinful husbands and sinful wives—God's truth so quickly becomes twisted in our understanding. Let us be clear, first of all, what this does not mean. It does not mean that you, as a wife, leave your mind on the wedding altar; that, as a wife, you have nothing to say in the marriage; that the development of your talents, abilities, wisdom, and insight is to be brushed aside; that you cannot think for yourself; and that you have become a dumb servant. A humble, wise, Christ-filled husband knows the blessing of his wife and seeks the blessing of the counsel of his wife. Proverbs 31 says of the woman that her husband doth safely trust in her. To submit does not mean that you do not have a mind of your own. Wives, be subject. But that does not mean that you renounce all of your abilities and all of your talents.

Nor does it mean that you put the will of your husband before the will of Christ. If a husband calls you in some way to do what you are convinced by God's Word is sinful, you follow Christ's will. While submitting, while reverencing, while coming under him, you say, "Honey, the Lord has placed you over me as my head. I want to show you that. But, Jesus is our Lord. And when you ask me to do that which is sinful, I cannot. I will not. And I may not do that."

Nor does this submission mean that a husband is given license to sinful tyranny. Marriage is a holy covenant of both husband and wife who vow that they will behave toward each other in a Christ-like manner. If a wife is contentious and will not submit to the yoke that Christ gives, and she does wrong to her husband, then she has set herself against the majesty of God. But if a man insists on his own fancy, despising his wife, and is cruel to his wife, he also defies God openly. The way that we are to approach our wife is not with harshness, acting like a madman, expecting to scare her with a grim look. If we do so, we defy God.

What does it mean to submit? The apostle says, “As the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.” In other words, the apostle says that a picture is worth a thousand words. The church is subject to Christ, and that is beautiful. That is a good thing. It means two things. It means, first, that the church gives herself willingly to advance Christ’s purposes and cause, and seeks the advancement of the Lord’s kingdom on earth. Do we, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, submit to Christ? How would one know? We would teach the sound doctrines that Christ has given to the church. We would show to any visitor or to anyone who would look into our church that the interest, the purposes, the causes of the Lord are our passion and our desire. We will not, as a church, say: “What do we want, what do we think we ought to do? How shall we get a name for ourselves in the community? How shall we influence people according to our own wisdom and get our name in the headlines?” But we will ask one question: “What are Christ’s purposes for us? What is the cause that Christ gives us to advance?” We will look carefully into the will of the Lord in Holy Scripture. We will come to know the heart of the Master, and we will devote ourselves to His purposes, to His task, and to His truth.

Secondly, the church submits to Christ by seeking His honor. If you read, for instance, Psalm 45, you will see that the church, the bride of Christ, enjoys to make known the majesty of her Master and Lord. The church delights, takes great pleasure, in extolling our Lord, our King, and our Husband. Psalm 45:2ff.: “Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips:...Gird thy sword.... ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness.” The church desires Christ to be seen in all of His glory and majesty. The bride of Christ, the church, has a sheer delight, a deep impulse, to proclaim the majesty and the glory, the worth, the might, the splendor, and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The church submits to Jesus Christ, therefore, in two ways: 1) She sees herself as serving the purpose of advancing His cause. She sees herself as expendable in His cause. 2) She finds great joy in proclaiming the honor of Jesus Christ.

Now, as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wife be to her husband. That means, fundamentally, you follow his spiritual leadership. But it means also that you desire him and his purpose in life to be carried through. It means that you delight in seeing him prosper in his gifts.

Christ, of course, is sinless, and a husband is not. A husband is sinful. And yet, as the wife, we will say, “I give myself to serve the advancement of your calling in this world. And I delight in seeing you take that calling and glorify God in your calling.” You will say to your husband, “I delight for you to take the initiative in our family. I’m glad when you take responsibility for things and lead. I flourish when you make sure the family is going in the way of wisdom and the way of the love of God.”

There is your husband before you. He is a sinner, saved by grace. He has gifts. He has a personality. He has a calling in this life. To submit to him means that you will see it as your place to encourage him, as God’s son, to develop in the calling God gives him. You will not say, “I want my own interests, I want my own life, I want my own career.” But you will say, “I want to use my time, my talents, for his good, for the good of our marriage.” You will honor and you will affirm your husband’s leadership and help him carry it through. You were made to be a help

meet for him (Gen. 2), to help him be the man of God that God calls him to be. You will, then, be his counselor. You will be his aid. You will be his helpmeet. You will delight that his name be held in respect through your actions. And that, through you, he is honored.

As the church is to Christ, we want the name of Christ to be honored by our actions. That is the desire of the church. So also the wife will want her husband to be honored as the world looks at her in her actions. The wife, then, will not run around criticizing her husband publicly, belittling him, telling everyone his shortcomings, discouraging him in what he wants to do in this life.

As no Christian man may have his wife in terror of him, for to do so is to despise God, so also no Christian woman may have her husband feeling hopeless, resigned, and deflated, for this too is to despise God. But as the church delights in God's cause, and as the church delights in the honor of Christ's name, so also the wife will delight in seeing her husband fulfilling his calling to be a man of God.

Submit in that way to your husband.

The apostle brings out that this submission to the husband is an exclusive thing. Submit yourselves to your *own* husband as unto the Lord. And again, Let the wives be subject to their *own* husbands in every thing. This is a unique submission to your own husband that is not fitting in relation to any other man. You are not called to submit to all men the way that you submit to your own husband. Marriage is exclusive. The husband and wife stand in a relationship to each other that they do not stand in toward anyone else.

Further, Paul makes plain that this submission is always to be rendered. "So let the wives be subject to their own husbands *in every thing*." This is usually more than what we might feel like or want to do. It may not always be obedience, for the wife must always obey God first. But there must always be submission. It comes out this way. You will say, "It grieves me when you venture into sinful acts and want me to go with you. You know that I can't do that. I have no desire to resist you. I want to follow you joyfully. But I cannot follow you into sin, as much as I love and honor you and your leadership."

It may not always be that you agree with your husband's decision. There may be times when the most submissive wife will hesitate at her husband's decision. It may look unwise to her.

Then it will go like this: Your husband is about to make a decision that seems foolish to you. At that moment you will express your submission in the following way: "Dear, I know that you've thought a lot about this, and I love it when you make decisions and plan for us. But I really don't have peace with this decision. I feel we need to talk about it some more. How about some time today?" In your disagreements, you make it clear that you honor him in his role. And you make it clear that if all the talking that needs to be done before a decision is reached has been done and you still disagree, you will defer to your husband willingly. Wives, submit yourselves.

Husband, it does not say, “You subject your wife.” Nowhere does the Bible say that. It calls the wife to do this willingly. Submission is something that is given. It must be given freely and willingly.

And cheerfully. As the church is subject to Christ. Not grudgingly, not stiffly. But joyfully. Because you want to show what your Christianity means to you in your marriage. This is not slavery. This is not degrading. This is the very heart and the demonstration of Christianity. The wife declares before the world, “I have one Master, not many. I have one Lord. I am His servant. And for Christ’s sake, I take up my calling and place to submit to my own husband.”

As husbands and wives, we must always begin by looking not to the other, but to the Lord. Do not begin by looking across the table at each other and asking yourselves, “What do I see?” But look up to God. Do not just trot out the name of God at your marriage ceremony, but put your marriage into His hands and guidance. Call upon Him with sincerity. If you do not look to God, if you look only at your husband and at all those things that can make you scream, the whole house is going to come down in confusion and ruin. And it will turn out to your pain.

As marriage is ordained of God, we who enter into this sacred union must look completely unto God, completely to Him and desperately unto Him. We must make God our refuge. We must make Him our motive. We must see Him who has joined us together. We must have our eye upon God. For God has designed marriage between husband and wife to represent the relationship of Christ and the church. And as a wife you have a calling, a holy, sacred trust. Not for your husband’s sake, but for Christ’s sake. To show to all who see you what it means that the church is subject to Christ, to show what the church thinks about Jesus Christ.

You do that by heartfelt submission. You show in all of your life toward your husband how much we, as children of God, are indebted unto our Savior, who has poured out the treasures of His mercy upon us.

Let us pray.

Father, we again thank Thee for Thy Word, and pray that it may enter into our hearts, that it may soften our hearts, and that it may give wisdom to our eyes. In Jesus’ name, Amen.