

## THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*June 2, 2013  
No. 3674*

*In the Beginning God Created Marriage  
Rev. Carl Haak*

Dear radio friends,

The truth of marriage is always urgent. Always the truth of marriage needs to be preached and taught. There has never been a generation that held marriage highly enough. There has never been a generation that honored marriage as a holy institution of God. How much more is that the case with our present generation?

There is a deep chasm between the biblical truth of marriage and the world's view of marriage. And the difference is gargantuan. Our age is the age of living together, of homosexuality, of take-it-or-leave-it marriage, of uninhibited sexual intercourse. Our age holds marriage as given by God in contempt. The biblical truth and vision of marriage is ludicrous to most people today.

This was also the case in Jesus' day. When Jesus, in Matthew 19, gave a glimpse of the magnificent view God has willed for the marriages of His people, the disciples responded and said to Him in verse 10: "If such be the case with a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." That is, Christ's view of marriage was so enormously different from what they had been taught that they could not imagine that it was a good thing. And so it is, unless you are given ears to hear and hearts to understand.

If that was the case when Jesus lived, how much more is the magnificent and holy view of Jesus for marriage unintelligible to the world in which we live. In our age, man's idol is self. The main doctrine of our age: do as you please. The central worship of our age: entertainment. The shrines of our age: TV and movies. And the most sought-after act: uninhibited sexual intercourse. Such a generation will scoff at Jesus and His view of marriage when He teaches that marriage is God's bond, for life, of one man and one woman. They will find that message unintelligible. And Jesus would say also to this generation: Not every one can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given: he that is able to receive it, let him receive it (Matt. 19:11, 12).

We begin today a series on marriage, the family, God's covenant, and living for the glory of God. We begin by confessing that our own sin and selfishness so corrupts us that we need the grace of God if we are to feel the wonder of God's purpose for marriage. We need the Word of God, by the Holy Spirit, to open our eyes. We need the grace of God to change us.

We need that because, not only are we sinful, but we live in a world that uses the sacred word "marriage" to refer to two men, or two women, joined together. It may well be only a short time before there is the collapse of our society into barbarism, and the coming of the Antichrist. And in that age we are called as Christians and as the church to proclaim the greatness and the glory of marriage. But that greatness and that glory are beyond our ability to feel and to understand without God's revelation in our heart, without the illumination and the awakening of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. We cannot know marriage; we cannot live in marriage; we cannot live godly lives in the family, without learning from God. We must sit at the feet of Jesus if we are to know. God must set us free from this self-centered, God-denying, lust-filled, sex-intoxicated

world. My prayer is that the Word of God alone may then govern us and that Christ may give us to see what God has created marriage and the family to be.

You might say to me, “Well, pastor, yes, but don’t you understand? I need something more. I need something more than just truth from the Bible. I need to have my marriage fixed. I have to have him changed. We need some practical help! Things are going downhill. It doesn’t work just to bring us simple truths from the Bible.”

The grace of God, dear child of God, for you and for me, begins with His Word. Jesus said in John 17:7: “Sanctify them [make them holy, give them power unto a holy life] through thy truth: thy word is truth.” The foundations must be laid within our hearts. The footings must be placed within our souls. We must be given a place to stand amid the winds of our age and our own sinful flesh. We must come to the Word of God. And we must bow without reservation to it.

I want to show you today that marriage was indeed given by God in the beginning; that it is an institution of God; and that it is God’s doing.

The institution of marriage for a male and a female, till death do them part or till God do them part, was God’s doing. God designed it. God instituted it. And God gave it. He did that, as recorded for us, in Genesis 2. This is the most basic and foundational truth that can be said about marriage. Marriage did not evolve by society. Marriage is not a cultural thing. Marriage is not something that an old bygone age thought up and now we may discard. It is God’s doing for man and for woman. The world rejects that. The world scoffs at that. That is why they treat marriage as they do. That is why news publications promote with glee the latest divorce and all the rest. Let this truth be impressed on our hearts: Marriage is God’s doing, it is God’s institution.

First of all, from Genesis 1 and 2, we learn that marriage is God’s doing because it was for marriage that He created the male and the female. In Genesis 1:27, 28 we are told that God made man, made us, male and female, in order that we might reproduce. We read: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them [that is, unto the male and the female], Be fruitful, and multiply.” But what was the relationship of the male and female that they were to have to one another in which they were to be fruitful and multiply? God explains that, beginning in Genesis 2:18ff. He explains what His design is for the male and for the female. We read in verse 18 that “the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” God says, “Solitude is not My design. This is not good. I will create a woman. I will create a help meet for him, a help suitable for him, tailor-made, designed by Me to complement the man, to complete him, to make him full, and to make him whole.”

Now note that God did not then just go and do it. But as we read from verse 18 and following, He caused the animals to pass, two by two, before Adam (male and female), in order that Adam could name them, and so that Adam could feel his need of a woman—feel it in his heart. We read in verse 20, after all the animals passed, “But for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.” And God said, “I’m going to make someone for you. But I’m not going to make someone unimportant. I’m not making for you, man, someone to use. I’m going to create someone that is vitally important for you.” This was God’s doing.

In verse 21 we read: “And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the

LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman.” He made the woman from the man—not from an animal, not an adaptation from an animal—but from man, who was made in the image of God, so that the woman equally stands in the image of God. He made the woman from a rib of Adam: the bones that protect his vitals, his heart.

Husband, the woman was not made from the foot-bone of the man, for you to trample over. She was not made from your head-bone. She was made from your rib-bone, whereby you are taught to love her as something near to your heart. She is given to be as a protection to your tender heart.

Then, when He made the woman, He brought her to Adam in marriage, verse 24: “Therefore a man shall cleave to his wife and they two shall be one flesh.” “And they were both naked ... and not ashamed,” we read in verse 25. That is marriage. Everything led to marriage. Marriage is God’s design. It is God’s doing. He made the male and the female in order that He might unite them in marriage.

Second, from Genesis 2 we learn that marriage is God’s doing in that He had the honor to give Eve to Adam, the honor of a father. We read in verse 22: “And brought her [that is, Eve] unto the man.” He did not hide Eve in the garden and say, “Adam, go find her.” But He was the first Father to give away the bride. “This is what I want for her,” says God. “This is what I want for the woman. I want to give her to this man.”

In a profound sense God had fathered Eve. Eve was His daughter. He enjoyed her, He loved her, He cherished her. But, though she was His, He gave her to this man in a relationship. He bound her to him and called it marriage. He took her in His own arm and He gave her to the man. He did not leave the woman “out there,” to wait to see what was going to happen. But He gave her to a man to cherish.

We read in our wonderful form for marriage that is used in marriage ceremonies this: “That God witnessed thereby that He doth, as yet with His own hand, bring unto every man his own wife.” God did this. Marriage is God’s doing. He brought Eve to Adam and gave Adam Eve. And God, ruling over all, brings to every man his wife and to every wife her husband.

Third, marriage is God’s doing because it was God who spoke what marriage was to be, defined what marriage was to consist in. Verse 24, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” Now who spoke the words of verse 24 of Genesis 2? In verse 23 we read, “And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, ...she shall be called Woman.” Is verse 24, then, a continuation of Adam’s words? Is Adam making the definition of marriage, that a man shall leave his father and mother? Is a man saying this? The answer is, No. Verse 24 was audibly spoken in the Garden of Eden, at that moment, by God. You mean in the sense that Genesis is the Word of God and God spoke all that Word? Yes, but I mean specifically that God *said* that. Jesus, in Matthew 19, said that Moses was the inspired writer of Genesis. And Jesus believed that in verse 24 Moses was indeed inspired to write, but he wrote down what God had audibly spoken.

Listen carefully as I read Matthew 19:4, 5: “And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife.” Jesus there makes plain that it was God who spoke the words that we find in Genesis 2:24. It was almost like a wedding ceremony. As a Father, He gave His daughter to a man. A man spoke a vow: “This is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.” And then it was God who joined them and said,

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

Now the point is this: When it is said that a man, you, husband, shall cleave, hold fast to, your wife, and you shall live with her and be one flesh, it was *God* who said that. Marriage is God’s design, God’s will, God’s institution, God’s ordinance. Not ‘living together.’ That is not His ordinance. Not one flesh sexually first, outside of marriage, and then marriage. No. This is God’s ordinance: He brings man and woman, husband and wife, together in a vow before Him, declares them married in His name, and gives them to live intimately as one flesh.

Finally, we learn from Genesis 2 that marriage is God’s institution because becoming one flesh is a union God Himself performs. This is the most weighty part of it. Verse 24 speaks, in the ultimate sense, not of what a man does in becoming one flesh, but of what God does. I want you to see that with me a moment. God has taken a rib from Adam, made Eve, brought her to him, and now He joins them as one flesh. And if we turn to Mark 10:7- 9, we read: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: *so then*,” Jesus says, “so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” Jesus, there in Mark 10, is quoting from Genesis 2:24. To Him, Genesis 2:24 was the most important verse in the Bible on marriage. It was the foundation. And He says that becoming one flesh is what *God* joins together.

When a couple speak their vows and consummate their union sexually, it is not man, it is not parents, it is not the pastor, who joins them, but God. God joins in marriage. And because it is God who joins them in marriage, Jesus draws the awesome conclusion: “Let not man put asunder.” What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Henceforth, husband and wife, when you are married, you go down life’s pathway together. For God hath joined you, and God alone is the One who may separate you, which He does in death. Marriage is God’s institution, God’s design for one man and one woman unto death.

The world does not reckon with this. And the Christians in the Christian church today may act as if they do not know it, as if they do not know anything about this. But it is very plain. God has spoken this plainly in His Word. It is God who joins a man to his wife and a woman to her husband. God does this. It is His institution. It is God’s doing. He made them male and female. He personally gave away the first bride. He spoke the design and intention of marriage. And He Himself united and joins us in marriage. Marriage is from God.

That is foundational. That is the most important thing for you to understand in your heart as you bow before the living and the true God, the Father of Jesus Christ. You must know this and it must be an awesome thing to you. This must be a personal thing to you. You must stand before God with submissive faith. This is most sobering. Marriage is of God. Your marriage is of God. He has joined you together. Let not man put asunder. It is His doing, great and marvelous. His works are perfect. His works are sought out in wisdom, say the Scriptures. So it is with your marriage.

This is comfort. If God has done it, will not He aid you? Will not He stand by to aid and to assist His own work? Will not He draw near to a heart that seeks first simply to honor Him and to reckon with Him in His works? Oh, He will surely give you grace. Honor your marriage as it is in truth from God. And God will honor you with abundant grace in your marriage.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word, and we pray that the Word may be the foundation of our life, the Word firmly planted in our hearts and souls. Bring it forth to the glory of Thy name and to our own comfort and need. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**

*June 9, 2013*  
*No. 3675*

*God's Design for Marriage*  
*Rev. Carl Haak*

Dear Radio Friends,

Last week we began a series of messages on the truth of marriage and the family for the glory of God. We began that series by looking into Genesis 2:18-24, which is the most foundational passage in the whole Bible on the truth of marriage. We noted that the truth of marriage is urgent—urgent especially for us in this generation, where God's works and God's institutions are held in contempt by the world of unbelief, and in which God calls us as the disciples of Jesus Christ to hear and to receive His living Word.

If you recall, last week we saw from Genesis 2 that marriage is God's doing. That is, it is God's institution. It is God's institution because, first of all, it was God who made them male and female—man and woman. Why? In order that He might have a marriage. Second, we saw that it was God's institution because He personally gave away the first bride, He brought Eve to Adam and gave her to him. Third, we saw that it was God's doing because He spoke the design of marriage. He defined what marriage was to be. Genesis 2:24—A man shall leave father and mother (it shall be a primary relationship in life) and shall cleave to his wife (that is, he shall hold dearly to his wife) and they two shall be one flesh. And, finally, we saw that marriage was God's doing because God Himself is the One who unites and joins us in marriage. Jesus said, when He expounded on Genesis 2:24, "What therefore God hath joined together." Those words were Jesus' exposition upon the words, "they shall be no more twain but one flesh." Jesus says that that means that God joins them together. Let not man, then, put asunder.

Now today we want to continue in this series and note the description of the marriage-bond a bit more carefully and then emphasize exactly what God's intention was with marriage, that is, that it be a display of what is closest to His heart.

First of all, then, we note that marriage is described by God in Genesis 2 as having these three elements. 1) According to God's Word, marriage is the union of a man and a woman: "And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man" (v. 22). Same-sex marriages, the relationship sexually of man and man, woman and woman, is sin as defined by God. And to use the word "marriage" to describe that relationship is to blaspheme God.

The apostle Paul teaches us in Roman 1:26, 27 that, when man rejects God and makes himself out to be God or makes his own god, then God passes a just judgment upon man. And, according to Romans 1:24, part of that judgment of God upon men who set themselves to reject

Him and will not bow to Him is this: “God gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own heart to dishonor their own bodies between them.” He gives them over to immorality. A forsaking and turning away from the true God is visited with the judgment of immorality—the lust of sinful flesh breaks out. And then that lust of sinful flesh is also judged by God. This is what the apostle Paul says in verses 26, 27: “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.”

Marriage, as defined by God, is the union of a man and a woman. Same-sex marriage is a sin. It is not the only sin in the world. It is not the unpardonable sin. It is a sin that the gospel of Jesus Christ calls men and women to forsake, to turn from, to cast aside, and then to bow in humble repentance before God and the Savior Jesus Christ.

2) We learn that marriage, according to what it is, is intended by God as the lifelong bond of a man and a woman until severed in death. Jesus said, a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. That is what Jesus said that God said in the beginning. He shall cleave, that is, he shall hold on to, his wife. God did not use the plural. He did not say wives. He used the singular. Two wives for one man is one too many. A man can love all of his children equally much, but he can love only one woman at a time.

And Jesus drew the conclusion from Genesis 2 that, since God joins a man and a woman together, only God can sever them. It was Jesus who said, “Let not man put asunder.” Man severs that union. But Jesus says: “Let not man put asunder.” So we read in the Word of God in Romans 7:2-4 that a woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he liveth; but if he be dead, she is free from that law.

Marriage is a lifelong bond. It is a lifelong bond of a husband and a wife, a man and a woman, until death, as we are going to see in just a moment, because marriage is a picture of God’s faithfulness to us His church.

3) We learn that marriage, according to God’s design, is the primary bond or relationship in life. A man (Gen. 2:24) shall leave his father and mother. Not that the relationship of parent and child, father and son, mother and daughter is over. But when God says “shall leave his father and mother,” he means in the sense of what is first and primary. God intends that marriage be a union that is first and primary in our life. Not the guys that you used to hang out with, not focusing on someone else who is going to supply your emotional needs and would be so understanding, but your husband and your wife. The two of you are in that primary bond of life. Your marriage is primary—something that identifies you, something that you are to care for first.

Why? Why did God do all of this? Why did God create and why did God give marriage? The answer is: His own glory! Marriage was given by God, as all things were made by God, for one purpose: God’s glory. He made all things for His own glory. “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever” (Rom. 11:36).

But how is marriage for God’s glory? The answer to that question is: marriage is for God’s glory because marriage is the bond that displays God’s beautiful covenant. In Genesis 2:24 God is speaking of a union: a man shall be joined unto his wife and they two shall be one flesh. A man shall cleave to his wife.

What kind of relationship is this? Is this a 50-50 relationship between a man and a woman? Why are they to hold to one another? Why can they not walk away from this? Why cannot they go from spouse to spouse to spouse? Why is adultery sin? And why may not marriage be rooted in romance? Why can you not fall in and out of love and fall in and out of marriage? Why is marriage a lifelong bond? Because marriage is given by God to point to something far deeper, something true about Himself. It points to something more permanent, far more glorious! It points to a sacred covenant that God makes with us His people in Jesus Christ. Our marriages are sacred covenants. They are commitments to weather the storms of life together because we are called in our marriages to reflect God and His commitment and covenant toward us.

This becomes very plain in the apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 5:31, 32. In verse 31, as Paul has been speaking about marriage and the calling of a husband and a wife, he, too, quotes from Genesis 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." And then in verse 32 he adds: "This is a great mystery [what I have been talking about—this joining of a man and a woman]: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

Now that is the most staggering and profound thing that could ever be said about marriage. In other words, marriage is patterned after Christ's commitment to His church. When God created man in the beginning as male and female and brought them into a union called marriage, He was patterning that after Christ and His bride, the church—not the other way around. God did not first make marriage and then say, "Well, hm-m-m, how illuminating it would be if I would pattern My relationship in Christ toward My people after this marriage. I'll pattern Christ and the church after what I have done here in the beginning." No! That is *not* the way it is! But God said, "It was first Christ and the church. It is first Me, in My love to My elect in Jesus Christ. That is first. And now I'll make marriage to reflect that."

It was first Christ (Rev. 13:8), who was slain from the foundation of the world. It was first God's eternal grace flowing through Jesus Christ unto His elect, before there was an Adam, before there was an Eve. And, in His own heart, because this is who He is (He is faithful, He is a God of covenant faithfulness), He designed marriage after the very relationship that abides in His eternal breast and heart toward us in Christ.

So, your marriage exists for the glory of God. Do you know why God gave you a wife? Do you know why God gave you a husband? To display to the world the truth about the faithful love of God—that is why. God brings us together not first of all for ourselves. Of course we enjoy blessings from the hand of our God and Creator. But God brought us together, first of all, to display His Son's grace and love to His church. God called us together in this bond of marriage in order that He might display Christ's sacrificing for His bride, in order that He might display His own precious love, in order that He might show that Christ loves with a forgiving love and never forsakes His own bride. The highest purpose for marriage is to put the covenant relationship of Christ and the church on display before the world, so that others may see it in concrete terms and reality.

The world does not know this. But this is the truth. This is why marriage exists. And if you are married, this is why you are married: to reflect Christ and the church.

Staying married is not, first of all, about yourself. It is not first of all about staying in love. It is not first of all about the other person. It is about keeping covenant as long as we both shall live—till death us do part. Good vows. Those are proper vows at the time of your marriage.

Why do we say that? Because the vow that Christ made to us when He died for us and by His grace brought us to Himself, that vow is unconditional and He is faithful. And we say, “Lord, I want to reflect that in my marriage.”

Marriage is lifelong because the one most valuable thing in all the world that we must show (we were created and saved to show it) is the faithful love of God. In times of distance from your wife, in times of backsliding, this is where my heart must be pricked. Christ keeps covenant with me. Do we see how serious, how sacred, how solemn is our marriage? God is saying, “You are married in order that all the world may know that I am faithful. That all the world may know that Christ loves the church.”

Well, there is a lot of application here. There is application for young adults and for teenagers. You need to prepare yourself for marriage. You prepare yourself for marriage not by the last fling as a single person. You do not prepare yourself by buying all kinds of things. You do not prepare yourself for marriage by looking at movies or pornography. You may be assured that if you do that, you have sowed the seeds that will, apart from God’s grace, destroy your marriage and bring untold bitterness into your soul.

No, you prepare for your marriage when deep down in your heart you live right now faithful to God. Faithful to God in your body, faithful to God in your thoughts. Girls, does that young man love God? Well, he says he does, you say. OK. Is he faithful to God? Well, what do you mean? What does he do with you and what does he want to do with you? Is he faithful to God?

Those who are married—sometimes we want the “quick fix.” We find that our hearts are filled with agony, and it seems as if we cannot endure it for yet another moment. We find out that *getting* married was easy. It is *staying* married that can be very hard and seem impossible for us. God’s Word is the power to change us. And I pray that this seed of God’s Word may land, by the Holy Spirit, on the heart of a little boy of six years old or a little girl of nine or a teenager of fourteen or nineteen or a woman of thirty-three or fifty-two or eighty. Here is the Word of God: Marriage is about covenant keeping. It is about showing the faithful love of God. That is what it is about. That is what God calls you to do.

May God put grit into our souls—spiritual grit—so that we are not blown away by the billboards, by the Internet, by the movies of this world, but that in Christ we know a faithful love of God, personally, as sinners—the wonderful, faithful love of God to us, so that we are committed in marriage to show a faithful love of God to each other, so that when the wind comes and the tornadoes of trouble blow, we are not blown away. Though hell break loose, we are committed to love faithfully even as He loved us. To our passions and to our lusts, to our feelings and to our rights, we say, “You are not my God! My rights? What is right? What about me? You are not God. Me is not God. God is my God. Covenant is my life. God is on display in my marriage. The God who does not forsake me. The God who takes me back in repentance.”

May God give us grace in our marriages. May God give us grace in this culture that destroys marriage, in this self-exalting land. May we not bow down at the shrine of our desires and our own emotions. But may we bow down at the foot of Christ and ask: “Lord, give me a marriage that displays what it means that Christ loves the church. Give me a marriage that wants first to show Thy glory, a marriage as it was intended by Thee in the beginning.”

Let us pray.



Father, we thank Thee for Thy precious Word, and we pray that it may be a good Word to our heart, that it may be a balm of healing, or recommitment, that we may focus now more clearly upon our calling. For, Lord, we are sinners. And we get off the track. So many things become so vitally important, especially our own rights, to us. May we rather cast our rights aside and say that we have but one blessed privilege: we shall show forth Thy faithful love. Grant it in Jesus' name, Amen.

## **THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**

*June 16, 2013*

*No. 3676*

*God's Rule of Conduct for Marriage*

*Rev. Carl Haak*

Dear Radio Friends,

In the last two weeks we have looked at the truth of marriage from the book of Genesis, the book of the beginnings. And we have learned that there are two foundational truths concerning marriage, two truths upon which marriage stands. We must sink the roots of our faith deep into these two truths.

The first is that marriage is God's doing. It is God's institution. When you are married, God did that. God united you in a covenant of marriage—one man, one woman—until death. We learned from Genesis 2 that God made man, and God made the woman *from* the man and brought the woman *to* the man and said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife." Jesus made the point most clearly, that marriage is God's doing for life, when He spoke these words in Mark 10:6-9: "From the beginning of the creation God made them male and female." Then He quoted from Genesis 2:24, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh. So then, they are no more twain but one flesh. What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." Hear those words. Think about those words from the mouth of Jesus Christ: What God hath joined together. Marriage is God's doing. Every marriage is God's doing. God joins a man and woman into one. So marriage is God's institution.

Secondly, marriage is also God's display. God has a purpose for marriage. That purpose is His own gracious covenant with us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Marriage is God's showcase, or God's model of Christ and the church. That was God's purpose, or God's design, God's intention in giving marriage. God always has a purpose in all of His works. And the purpose of all of God's works is to reveal something about Himself. The apostle Paul makes this point most clear in Ephesians 5:31, 32 when, quoting again from Genesis 2:24, he says, "This is a great mystery"—namely, that a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife—"but I speak concerning Christ and the church." In other words, when God gave the union of one man and one woman in marriage, joined together, holding fast to each other, joined in vows and sexual union, God was portraying something. He was portraying the covenant of Christ and the church. God's intention for marriage is that it be a model, a showcase, of Christ and the church. That lifts marriage out of the sewer of the sitcoms and it elevates it to the clearest sky of God's purpose and glory. That spells out what married people are to be. Our calling as husband and wife is to display the covenant, the faithful, forgiving

grace of God to each other; to mirror to the world what it means that Christ and the church are united in a perfect bond of love and peace.

Marriage, therefore, is pointing to something glorious and eternal. Marriage itself, said Jesus, will pass away. In Matthew 22:30 the Lord said that in the resurrection, that is, in eternal life and glory, they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Marriage passes away because marriage now is intended to point to something. And when that something comes, the model vanishes. What it points to is Christ and the church—something that endures throughout eternity and will be perfected when Jesus returns.

Marriage, then, is God's doing. God married you. And your marriage has God's intention that it be a model of what is closest to His heart: the union of Christ and the church.

Now, if marriage is to be this model of Christ and the church, then marriage must be based upon forgiving grace. The most crucial, central thing to practice in marriage is the forgiving grace of God. For how is it that Christ is married to the church, to us? How can that marriage possibly work? The answer is: forgiving grace. So our marriages are to be a display, a showcase, of God's forgiving grace.

This is how the apostle Paul puts it in Colossians 3:12 and 13: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." The code of Christian conduct is not based, says the apostle, on how others treat you, but, rather, as Christ has done to you, so you are to do to others. The code of Christian conduct is not fairness as we would interpret it. It is not "Well, it's my turn now." That is not the code of Christian conduct. But as Christ did to you, so do you to others—in every relationship of your life.

Now marriage is not, "Well, as he did to me, I'll do back to him." Or, "If that's the way she's going to be, I'll show her!" No, you may not look to your spouse, to see how your spouse has acted, in order to determine how you are going to behave and act. But, as Christ has done for and to you, so are you to do to your spouse. In other words, in marriage, you and I are to live hour by hour in glad and humble experience of God's forgiveness of ourselves. That is the vertical—what *God* has done for *us*. Then we are to reflect that, we are to mirror that, we are to mimic that, we are to bend that out on the horizontal, and we are to live hour by hour in humble, joyful forgiveness and forbearance of one another. Marriage, because it is to be the picture of Christ and the church, is therefore the showcase, the display before the world, of God's forgiving grace, when husband and wife forgive each other even as Christ has forgiven them.

Are you on the brink today of horrific feelings in your marriage, of resentment and anger and bitterness? Have you fallen over the brink into the awfulness and hardness of unforgiveness and bitterness? What are you going to do? What is the solution?

Marriage is a heart issue. God says to you, "My child, sink the roots of your heart into My forgiving grace. Remember what I have done for you. And so do ye to your spouse."

May that word of God speak to all of us in every relationship of our life. May it speak to children and young people who one day are to be married, that their marriage may be built upon that rock. And may it speak to us who are married. Marriage has a rule of conduct. The rule of conduct in marriage is this: As Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

The apostle, then, is saying to us that it is exactly out of the experience of what Christ in His mercy has done for us and how Christ bears with us presently and of His mercy and compassion, that we are to conduct ourselves and we are to treat our spouse. Your relationship to God is *first*.

And we need to begin by asking the question, “Do I know that?” Do you know that grace of God to you? Have you truly tasted it? Is it a mere theory or is it a living experiential reality in your soul? Is the reason for hurting relationships in your family or in your church this, that you do not know, you have not tasted, what God has done for you? Do you believe and experience what God, by grace in Christ, has done for you? Do you embrace that wonder of pardon and forgiveness? Do you treasure it? Is it amazing, absolutely glorious? Is Christ all to you?

If that is the case, then we will want to show that in our relationships to others, and especially in our relationship of marriage. You say, “But pastor, you are talking today of marriage. Doesn’t this truth that we are to treat others as Christ has treated us apply to every relationship of life, not just married Christians, but teenage girls as they live with each other in the schools and boys and girls and brothers in the Lord Jesus in the church—must we not always be showing outwardly to others what we have received inwardly of God? And the answer to that is Yes! Always we are to show forth the grace that God has shown to us. But I emphasize marriage because marriage is foundational. It is the most long-lasting, the most intimate relationship, and it is the picture of Christ and the church. That is why God gave marriage—to be a picture of Christ and the church. Therefore, especially in your marriage, practice your faith there! Do not begin by practicing your faith first to the stranger, or first to the neighbor who does not live with you. But practice that experience of pardon and grace that you have received of Christ, practice that first in your relationship toward those closest to you, toward your spouse.

Now, what has Christ done for us? Let us see how Paul presented that in the beautiful epistle to the Colossians. The apostle teaches us that Christ has delivered us from the wrath of God against our sin. In verse 6 the apostle speaks of the wrath of God that is coming upon the children of disobedience. That is where we start. It is very important to start right there. Christ has overcome the wrath of God against our sins.

We are tempted to think that our wrath and our anger against our spouse are too big to overcome. But we must see that the grace of God has overcome something infinitely greater—the wrath of God against our sins. And how was that wrath removed? Go back to Colossians 2:13, 14. We read, “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” The apostle Paul says that God took our sins, our debts, the handwriting of ordinances that were contrary to us, every infraction that we have committed that cried out for punishment—God took those infractions, that sin, and set it aside by nailing it to the cross.

Now, you do not literally take sins and put a nail through them on a cross and fix them upon a cross. The apostle means the nails that were driven through the hands and feet of Jesus and the sufferings of Jesus upon the cross two thousand years ago. Jesus bore all that was written against us. All the sins, all the infractions of God’s people, chosen in Christ—God nailed those to the cross by pouring out the punishment those sins deserved upon His beloved Son.

The apostle says, “having forgiven you all your trespasses.” This did not happen with any help from you. You did nothing to remove your sins. You did not deserve this. God did that graciously

for you, before you were even born. Now make sure you see personally this most wonderful of all truths. Do not sail over it. Do not let it sail over your head. Do not have a hard heart to it. God took the record of all of our sins, and instead of holding them before our face and sending us to hell, He put them in the palm of His Son's hands and drove a nail through them into a cross.

Whose sins? My sins! Your believing wife's sins. Your brother's sins. Jesus was punished as the substitute of God's elect children. You cannot believe that too strongly. What Jesus did went beyond forgiveness. For the work of the cross goes beyond pardon. The work of Jesus Christ was also righteousness. He obtained righteousness for us. God required not only the punishment of sin but also perfection. And Jesus died both to bear the punishment of our sin and to obtain for us, by His perfect loving obedience, a spotless righteousness before God.

So what has Christ done for me? God, out of an immeasurable love, gave His Son to bear my punishment and perform all righteousness in my place. Through faith I know that right now. I have His righteousness as accounted to be my own. The Bible itself puts it in such beautiful terms. II Corinthians 5:21, "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

That is the foundation of marriage. Marriage is to be built upon that truth, upon an understanding of the grace of forgiveness. Christ has forgiven you. The glorious streams of grace have fallen down from heaven upon dirty, selfish, angry, bitter sinners—you and me—and has cleansed us. And in the relationship of marriage, which is the model of Christ and the church, which is supposed to be reflecting what Christ has done for the church, we are to take that grace that has come to us and we are to reflect that to our spouse. So the apostle says, in Colossians 3: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering ...even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

This is what it means. Let the measure of God's grace to you in the cross of Christ be the measure of your grace to your spouse. That is the rule of conduct. Treat your spouse the way Christ has treated you. As the Lord bears with you, even so do you unto your spouse. The Lord bears with you every day. Every day we fall far short of His will. Indeed, the distance between what Christ expects of us and what we achieve is infinitely greater than what you expect of your spouse and of what your spouse achieves. Christ forgave much more than we ever do. Christ bears much more. Let this rule be the rule of your conduct, whether you are married to a believer or an unbeliever: the measure of His grace to me is to be the measure of the grace that I show unto my spouse, and unto all those with whom I come into contact.

But you say, "Pastor, you tend to be a bit negative when you talk about marriage. You talk immediately about forgiving and forbearing. Isn't marriage also about romance and love? Can't we have a little more positive here? Where is the love? Christ and the church, that is love, isn't it? Doesn't Christ treasure the church? And isn't there a book in the Bible (the Song of Solomon) that makes us blush over how tender Christ is in doting over His wife, whispering sweet things to her? Don't you believe that aspect of Christ and the church should be modeled in the Christian marriage?"

The answer is: I sure do! Marriage is to be two (male and female), humbling themselves in faith, dwelling in love, seeking to please and meet one another's needs. Yes, love. But I stress that marriage models Christ and the church by showing, first of all, forgiving grace. I stress that because there is going to be sin in your marriage (and in all your relationships). In your marriage

there are going to be those idiosyncrasies, those peculiarities, those habits that that person has whom you married that simply get your goat. Little things, maybe. Or big things—he doesn't talk, he doesn't understand, he leaves his clothes all around. You need a way to manage that.

Still more, I speak of forgiving grace because the way of forgiveness in Christ makes love flourish. The hard and rugged work of forgiving and enduring is what makes those affections flourish when they seem to have died. Anger and bitterness and resentments can be so strong, like a tempest in our soul. But then we are brought to the cross to see what we have done, and that Christ has forgiven us. Then, even though we are tempted to say that our love in this marriage has died, when we are at the cross we are reminded again of the grace that God has shown to us.

God is glorified when two very different people, two people who cannot live together, two selfish sinners who have hurt each other, are humbled before what God has done for them, and in the light of what God has done they forge a life of faithfulness, love, and tenderness, in the furnace of their trials, relying upon Christ.

The Christian life must be lived under the shadow of the cross. The Christian marriage must never stray from the cross of Jesus Christ. As Christ forgave you, so also do ye. When you get too far from the cross in your thoughts or in your experiences, you are going to be in trouble in your marriage. That is the battle. That is the focus. The focus in marriage is not, first of all, the other person. But the focus is this: What has Christ done for me? Do I know the grace of God? That is sweet. That amazing, that knock-you-off-your-feet (off your pride) free grace! Does that huge truth fill our hearts? God has forgiven all our trespasses. He has taken the record of our sins against us and nailed it to the cross. Drive that truth into your conscience.

Husband and wife, that truth must be greater to you than any problem in your marriage. And if any problem in your marriage is a bigger thing to your soul than what Christ has done for you in His mercy, then the problem is that you do not know, you do not experience personally, what Christ has done for you.

Believe this word of God—this key to a happy marriage.

The rule of conduct is this: What has Christ done for me? When I bow before the cross and see His amazing grace, that will awaken emotion and affection. And as Christ has done to me, so I will be resolved to do to my spouse.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy good Word. And we pray for the softening of our hearts and the influences of the Holy Spirit upon them—that out of the experience of Thy grace we may so walk and so treat our husband or our wife that Thy name might be glorified in our marriage. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**

*June 23, 2013*  
*No. 3677*

*A Dress Code for Marriage*  
*Rev. Carl Haak*

Dear Radio Friends,

How do Christian married people treat each other in their marriage? What is the rule of conduct for them? Do they judge how they shall behave toward their spouse on the basis of how their spouse behaves toward them? Do they say, “Well, if that’s the way he is, I’ll be this way”? Or, “Well, when she does this, then I’ll think about showing some consideration”? No! The Bible says that that is the thinking of the proud flesh. The rule of conduct for Christian married people, as well as for all Christians, is that new and blessed way revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The apostle Paul captures it in these words in Colossians 3:13: “Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

The rule of conduct in Christian marriage is that the measure of God’s grace to me in Christ must also be the measure of my grace and kindness shown to my spouse. Or put it this way: I must consciously mirror the grace that God has shown to me in Christ to my spouse.

And if you ask, “Why exactly is that for marriage?” then the answer of the Bible is that marriage has been designed by God intentionally to be the picture of Christ and the church. Marriage is the model. Marriage is the showcase. Marriage is the mirror. Marriage is the demonstration in this present world of what it means that Christ and the church are bound together in an eternal, faithful covenant of love and grace. In order to display what that means, God has given marriage. Marriage is to be a picture of Christ and the church. And because that is so, the foundation of marriage and the standard of conduct of all marriage in Christ’s name is that we are to treat each other even as Christ has treated us.

Now I was saying that the apostle Paul gives this rule of conduct both to married people and to all Christians in Colossians 3:12 and 13: “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” The apostle Paul is saying to us that when we know God’s forgiving grace to us personally, then we will also follow a certain “dress code,” we will be anxious and desirous that there be a certain inward spiritual dress code that we will put on. He says, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God...bowels of mercies.” What he says is very beautiful. The words of this passage could well be used for a wedding meditation. He says, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” Anyone who is married can immediately sense the relevance of that passage to married life.

In effect, the apostle Paul is saying to us, the first question you need to ask is: Who am I? Before you get dressed inwardly, before you decide what you are going to put on, what things you are going to display in your life, you need to ask the question: Who am I by the grace of God? What moral, spiritual attitudes ought I to be displaying, based upon who I am in Jesus Christ. So he says, “Put on.” And he tells us what we need to put on: bowels of mercies, kindness, etc. But before he gets to what we have to put on, that spiritual wardrobe, he says: “Put on therefore, *as the elect of God, holy and beloved.*” In other words, before I tell you what to put on, first I need to tell you who you are. First look in the mirror and see who you are by the grace of God—the elect of God, holy and beloved. Remember who you are.

Three glorious identities must be before us before we go to the spiritual wardrobe and pick out what we are going to display or what we are going to put on.

We must remember, first, that by God's grace we are the elect of God, or the chosen of God. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God." That is a thrilling, humbling doctrine. We are God's elect. This election, according to the Scriptures, took place before the foundation of the world, when God chose us, out of mere grace, to belong to Jesus Christ. The apostle put it this way in Ephesians 1: "According as he hath chosen us in him [in Christ] before the foundation of the world [before God laid the foundation of the world, or before He created, that is, before time was], that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." Solely by God's pre-choice and free grace, not based upon anything in us! Simply because God would be gracious He elected those whom He would save in Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul goes on to teach us in Romans 9 that this election was before we were born or before we had done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election would stand, not of works, but of God who would call. Out of mere grace God chose His children.

The apostle Paul treasured this. He saw this as the only source and spring of salvation. He treasured it so that, you might remember, he goes on to say in Romans 8: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" The wonder of being invincibly loved by God, eternally loved of God, graciously loved of God—Oh, what a thrilling and what a humbling doctrine!

The apostle says, "Put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved." The word "holy" is a word in the Bible that refers to something that is separated from the common and dedicated to the special service of God. It is something that is set apart for God. The Scriptures teach that God chose us, He elected us, for a purpose. We read, just a moment ago in Ephesians 1:4, that He chose us in Christ "that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." According to His eternal love, He pulls us out of the world, out of the pit of sin. He works in our hearts the new life of Jesus Christ, so that we might be set aside for His use. Listen to what Peter says in I Peter 2:9: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; *that ye should shew forth the praises of him* who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

So it was not that we were first good and then God chose us out of the mob of sinners. No, God called us out of His free grace. God made us holy. God cleansed us in Christ in order that then we might be holy in Christ.

Then he says, "Put on, as elect of God, holy and beloved." Loved of God. God, the Maker of the universe, the eternal and the perfect, glorious, beautiful God, has loved us merely out of His grace. He willed to draw us unto Himself. He so loved us that He gave His only begotten Son that we should not perish but have everlasting life.

Now, husband and wife, all of us, we must see this; we must savor this; we must get our life from this; we must place our hope in this. By the mercy of God we are the chosen, the holy, the loved of God. And since that is who we are, or who we have become by God's mercy, on the basis of that, get dressed. On the basis of that, put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness. In other words, how does a chosen, holy, loved child of God adorn himself? What inward, spiritual dress does he put on? How does he want to appear from his life?

The apostle says that that dress can be divided into three wonderful groups, all three possessing an inward and an outward.

The first is: bowels of mercies and kindness. That is, the inward thing will be the bowels of mercy, the external will be kindness. Bowels refer to one's intestines or, literally, "guts" of mercy. Bowels is where we feel our emotions. We say, "We feel it in our guts, in our stomach." It means to be moved by the mercy of God—God's great compassion for miserable sinners. There is something stirring in you. It is not just a notion floating in your head. It is the mercy of God to *me*, filling me also with mercy, so that it comes out in kindness. When you know the mercy of God, it will be reflected in a life of kindness. That is how you will treat people. Especially when you are shunned or when you are hurt, you will be kind. Kindness in the marriage, in the home. The feeling of mercy and kindness toward your wife or toward your husband.

Is it not strange that we can treat people civilly almost anywhere else but not at home? The Word of God is: "Husbands, sink your roots, by faith, into the forgiving grace of Christ. Become more and more a merciful person. Express that in deeds of kindness. Battle that unmerciful, sinful person inside of you who wants to get your hands around the neck of your wife. Deal with her in kindness." And wives, "Sink your roots into the mercies of Jesus Christ. Fight that anger, fight that critical attitude, fight resentment, and show forth kindness."

The next group is: humility of mind (that is the inward) and meekness (that is the outward). Inward humility of mind expressed in meekness. Humility of mind is, literally, lowliness of mind. It is the right concept of ourselves, so that we are not stuck on ourselves or full of ourselves or proud. When we are lowly of mind, then we will express that in meekness, which counts others better than ourselves and wants those others to be advanced and sees ourselves as a servant of them. That is meekness. That is what happens when we are lowly in Christ.

We are talking here of a miracle. This is an absolute miracle of grace. This is impossible—to be meek, for us to get low, to esteem others better than ourselves, to want them to be exalted above ourselves! We do not want that according to our sinful flesh. Even in those who are in Jesus Christ, that sinful flesh rages. This is not easy. We say, "Well, let him have it. Look what he did to me. I'll give her a piece of my mind! How dare he...." Sink your roots into the gospel of the grace of Christ. And if you are behaving in the manner I just mentioned, in that proud, resentful way, repent! You need to have a right mind about you, a lowly mind, knowing the mercies of Christ expressed in all meekness.

Then, finally, the apostle says, "Longsuffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another." Longsuffering is patience. It means that if you have a short fuse, you must get on your knees and pray for a really long fuse. James says in chapter 1 of his epistle that we must be slow to anger, quick to listen, slow to speak. Anger is a marriage-killer. Where does anger come from in your marriage? What are the roots of rage? You say, "I'm so angry, I see red. I could kill!" Anger is rooted in unbelief and in pride. It is rooted in not embracing and treasuring the gospel of Jesus Christ that I, by grace, am now chosen, holy and loved of God, and forgiven. And it is sinful pride.

Jesus spoke, in a parable, of a man who was forgiven a great debt and went out and was angry with his brother who owed him a little trifle. The man grabbed his brother by the throat and cried out: "Pay me what thou owest!" Why was he so angry? You say, "Well, this is a guy who obviously needs anger management classes. He's got issues." No, the Lord says that his



anger was based in this: He did not know what it was to be forgiven. He was proud before God. That was the basis of his anger. He was proud before God.

The apostle says to us today, “Christ has forgiven you. You are the holy and the beloved of God.” That solves a thousand issues in your marriage and in your family or among your teenagers and with parents. No, those issues that I say are solved are not issues that just fade and go away or that all of a sudden are gone. It means that every day you need to go back to the cross and hear the word of the cross of Jesus Christ. It certainly means that you and your wife (husband) and family all need to go to church your whole life long, twice on the Lord’s Day, and sit under the gospel of the grace of God and the cross. But it means that every day, under the gospel, under the cross, your problems become less complicated. And to the degree that you distance your heart from the cross, to that degree your wife pays (or your husband pays) in your marriage. And your marriage experiences strife and hurt and anger and resentment and you hurt each other. Why? Because you have allowed your heart, as a child of God, to be distant from the message of the cross.

Under the cross, two children of God live together and glorious things can happen. We begin to behave toward each other like Christ.

The apostle emphasizes that, in a Christ-like behavior in marriage, we will forbear one another. Forbear is to endure. That certainly does not sound very romantic. You have to endure your wife and you have to forbear your husband. Well, remember, first of all, that it is something that Christ does all the time. In Luke 9:41, talking to His disciples, Jesus says, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and suffer you [forbear you]? How long shall I put up with this?” Forbearing is a grace that we will not need in heaven because we will be perfect. But it is a grace that we need now, and we need lots of it, because we sin repeatedly. Enduring, forbearing one another—that is, stick in there, bear those sins, bear those slights in kindness and in meekness, even as Christ to you.

You say that this does not sound very romantic? Do you remember what the definition of love is according to God’s Word (I Cor. 13)? Look it up! You will find this description of love: Bears all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth. Forbearing one another and forgiving one another even as Christ hath forgiven you. The word means “graciously give.”

Someone wrongs you, someone hurts you, someone disappoints you. He is in your debt. You say, “I’ll make him pay. I’ll get the last word. I’ll mope and get my way and, oh, he’ll pay for that (or she will pay for that!).” Do you listen to yourself sometimes? Listen to yourself. What are you saying? Where would you be today if Christ ever spoke to you that way? This is like Christ; this is the purpose of your marriage; this models Christ and the church: that you and I say, “I will not treat my spouse badly because of their sins and annoying habits. I won’t do that. But I will treat them on the basis of what Christ has done for me.”

And then I will forbear, which means, yes, those sins and habits really bother me, but they are not bigger than what I have done and what Christ has done for me on the cross.

When you get married, you do not know what it will be like in ten, twenty, or thirty years. Our fathers crafted wedding vows that face reality. They crafted their vows with their face to reality. This is the vow: “To have and to hold from this day forward; for better, for worse; for rich or for poor; in sickness and in health; to love and to cherish till death us do part. And, thereto, I pledge you my faithfulness.” How can anyone vow that? This is how. Beneath the

shadow of the cross. Under the grace of God, knowing that we are chosen, holy, and beloved of God. When we know that we are forgiven by Christ, then out of that experience of His perfect love we are ready to vow in undying love for our spouse.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word, and we pray for its blessing upon our spirits. Make our hearts receptive to Thy Word. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**

*June 30, 2013*  
*No. 3678*

*Husbands, Love As Christ*  
*Rev. Carl Haak*

Dear Radio Friends,

God intends marriage to be the picture of Christ and the church. God has created marriage to be a model, to be a mirror, of something that is dear to Him, of what He calls His covenant, a covenant that He has made in the blood of His dear Son with His people in Jesus Christ. As God loves His bride, the church of Jesus Christ, so a husband is to love his wife. That is the burden of the Word of God to us today.

We find it in Ephesians 5:25-27: "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."

One reason why you cannot say too often that marriage is to be the picture of Christ and the church is that this reminds us that our marriage is based on grace. Marriage is not 50-50. Marriage is not, "Well, I will if you will." But if we look at the relationship that exists between Christ and the church, we find that it is, after all, all about grace. Christ chose the church by grace, eternally, in election. Christ, by His power and faithfulness, preserves the church. Christ obtained the church by His own blood. Christ pursued the church and made the church His own. And He will perfect the church by grace. We do not deserve any of this. Salvation is all of His grace.

So marriage is based on grace. The definition of marriage would be this: Two sinners, knowing the grace of Christ to them, and now bound for life, showing each day grace that they have tasted from God.

In the last weeks we have emphasized that God's grace gives us as a husband and as a wife to forbear and to forgive their spouse the annoying idiosyncrasies, the sins, and the weaknesses that become apparent in married life. Grace gives us to obey what we find in I Peter 4:8: "Above all

things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” Grace gives a husband and wife the ability to live together in marriage.

The emphasis on forgiving and forbearing in marriage is, after all, at the very center of our calling in Jesus Christ —whether married or unmarried, male or female, young or old. Jesus said in Luke 6:29: “And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also.” He said further (v. 35), “But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest.” Now if that is the general rule for the Christian (we are to return good for evil), how much more in our marriages!

These commands of God in Jesus Christ to return good for evil do not stop when one gets married. Marriage is an opportunity given by God to exercise that grace. In marriage we must find a way, standing before the cross, to maintain covenant-keeping love and forgiveness. But the grace of God does more. That is good news for us in the married state.

The grace of God gives us to do something else as well. Not only does the grace of God give us the power to forgive and to endure when we believe that we have been sinned against, but it is also the power to change. It is also the wonderful power to stop sinning. The apostle Paul could say in I Corinthians 15:10, “I am what I am by the grace of God.” He was a *changed* man, by the grace of God! Christ’s grace to the church, to us the bride, changes us. If you look at the text that I read in Ephesians 5 you will note that the apostle says that Jesus “might sanctify and cleanse [the church] with the washing of water by the word.” In other words, the grace that is in Jesus Christ changes the church.

If the emphasis on grace in our marriages were only that we are called to forgive and to forbear, you might get the idea that I am saying to married people, on the basis of God’s Word, “Well, there is little hope. You just have to put up with this. Marriage is ‘grin and bear it.’” No, there is more. Grace sanctifies, that is, makes holy. Grace changes. By the grace of God, before the cross we begin to learn how to live pleasing to God in marriage. In fact, if you read chapter 5 of Ephesians, you will find that the *whole* chapter is talking about the transforming power, the renewing power, of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, husbands and wives are indeed to be ministers of the grace of God one to the other. We are, then, as a husband and wife, to see our calling to be to help each other, to conform each other more and more to Christ and the church. The words “You can’t change him” are not true. Well, it is true in the sense that *you* do not have that power. But it does not mean that husbands and wives are simply to be stuck in bad patterns of behavior. We may be instruments of God’s grace to each other—to change each other.

In other words, marriage is not simply: turn the other cheek. But as Christ loved the church, so must be our marriages. God’s grace and word *do* sanctify us in our Christian life. We *do*, while never becoming perfect, mature in faith. So also in marriage. Marriage is the place where we are called to grow in grace. Marriage is not a static union. Marriage is an institution in which God will produce change, in which we are to grow up spiritually. We are to learn to *stop* some of those foolish, selfish, sinful things that we do, hurting each other. You do not just keep on doing them.

Yes, there must first be the grace to forgive. That is the foundation. If we do not begin there, then it will not work. If we do not from the heart forgive, then all of our efforts to change the other person in marriage will sound like an ultimatum. “If you don’t..., then I’m out of here.”

No. That is not Christ and the church. We do not become His by our obedience, but by His blood. And when He, our husband, calls us to change, then that call is the fruit of His wonderful grace. Because He forgives us, His grace makes us want to be pleasing to Him, to change from a sinful way to a way that is pleasing to Him. In fact, the Christian experiences a burning desire to put away his sins and be like Christ.

Is marriage, then, to be the picture of Christ and the church in which we exercise forgiving grace? Yes, but a grace to be conformed, to change, and to be instruments of change in each other so that we become what is pleasing to Him.

So husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church.

The whole passage in Ephesians 5 impresses on husbands that they are consciously and deliberately, out of an obedience and allegiance to God, to conform their actions and attitudes after Christ. God is saying something very simple here. “Husband, you have to mirror to your wife what Christ is to His church.” The comparison runs through the whole passage. We read in verse 23: “For the husband is the head of the wife, *even as Christ is the head of the church.*” Then, later on, we read that we are to nurture and cherish our wives *as Christ the church*. And the apostle makes it very plain in verse 32 that all that he is saying about marriage has to do with Christ and the church. That means, husbands, that the one thing that you must do is to drink in Christ. If you are to be a good husband, you must immerse yourself in Jesus Christ. With the apostle Paul, as he says in Philippians 3, you must have one holy passion: “That I might know him, my lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Now, you do not get yourself immersed in Christ in front of the television night after night. You do not get that by looking inside of yourself. But you get that in this blessed book called the Bible, and in its blessed doctrines, its beautiful truths.

Let me give you a few suggestions of passages to make your meditation, your study, your intense, heartfelt quest to understand.

Look into Colossians 1, especially the passage beginning after verse 15, where Christ and the church are so beautifully explained for us. Look into Hebrews 1, where Christ is taught to be the express image of God. Read Proverbs 8. Make the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament an object of your study. And spend some time with Ephesians 5. Pour over such passages and ask God to make you know Christ, to walk with Christ, to obey Christ, to be like Christ to your wife.

Now when I say that we are to be like Christ to our wives, immediately I want to guard that statement from an abuse. I will not play into the hands of an attitude that is shown toward wives, an attitude of a small-minded, selfish, controlling husband who takes that statement “be like Christ” to mean: “She had better be what I want. I will change her to suit me.” When you hear the words that you must be like Christ to your wife, it should not register in your mind as a lever and as a place of great prominence over her so that now she has to be what you want. But it should make you tremble.

The apostle says, “Husbands, love your wives as Christ. Be as Christ.” But he does not say, “You *are* Christ.” “As” does not mean that in every way you are like Christ. You are not. We are not—as husbands. Christ is infinite. Christ is perfect. Christ is omnipotent. And we are not. Christ is infallible. Christ is sinless. And we are not! The goal that we have as a husband is that our wife serve Christ.

Love your wife as Christ loved the church. The word “love” here is a reference to the pure and the holy love of God in Jesus Christ. It is a cleaving together. It is a faithfulness to be together in holiness. We find this statement in Colossians 3:14, “And above all these things put on charity [love], which is the bond of perfectness.” Charity, or love, is a bond in holiness.

Now note with me that God gives it as a command: “Husbands, love your wives.” In other words, love is not primarily, or first, a feeling. But it is a grace that God gives to us when we are born again. The apostle John says in I John 4:7 and 8, he that loveth is born of God. To love means that you have been given, in your heart, by grace, to know the amazing love of God to you, a faithful love that will not let you go, an infinite love, that He gave His own Son for your foul sins. Love, now, your wife, as Christ loved the church.

To do that means that you will, by faith, see your wife as God sees her. You will see her as she is chosen in love and is given God’s Son to die for her, so that God will hear no charge brought against her as to any condemnation. You will see your wife as Christ sees her—Christ working in her, Christ placing her close to you. It is by faith to see that God in His all-wise and infinite love gave your wife and your children to you. And they are perfectly right for you.

This love is an exclusive love. Love your wife as Christ loved the church. Christ loved only the church. He says in Isaiah 43 and Jeremiah 33 and many other places of Scripture, “You alone are my love. You are my fair one. I have chosen you out of all the world to be my own.” So when you as a man say “I love you” to the girl that you marry on your wedding day, then that love is not simply a rush of emotions in a dark spot. But you are saying, “God has given me to know His love. And you, my wife, you alone, will reign in my heart. Without you I am not complete. I will give my life for you. My thoughts, my heart, my body. I will protect you, I will guard you from evil.”

This love is a self-denying love. That is the most amazing part of this. “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church, *and gave Himself for her.*” In His love, Jesus, our eternal husband, died on a cruel tree, a cursed tree of Calvary, in order that we, foul sinners, might be His forever and ever. The debt and the filth of our sins, which called out for our damnation, He took that upon Himself. He died. The Scriptures declare (I Pet. 3:18) that it was the Just One who died for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. The apostle Paul says in Galatians 2 that the Son of God loved me and *gave Himself for me.* He emptied Himself. He took on Himself the awful death and the punishment that is due to us. His love for us was unfathomed, immeasurable, unending, uncaused by us. He did not love us because we loved Him. No, we love Him because He loved us.

Now, as a husband, you must love your wife as Christ loved the church, by dying to yourself, by seeing your life expendable for her spiritual good and growth. It means that you go to work 10-12 hours a day perhaps to support your family. When you come home, you are tired! But to love your wife means that you listen to her. You talk to her. You hug her. You care for her. You pray with her. You encourage her. You counsel her. You comfort her. Because she is more important to you than yourself.

And when we get beyond the romance of that, and we realize after awhile, that “I am not that way. I can not do that. And, besides, my wife is not always the kind of person who makes it very easy to do those things,” then we get on our knees and we listen to God, to the God who made us, the God to whom we belong. Marriage, your marriage, is to be a picture of Christ and

the church. Love her as Christ loved the church. Be like Christ in this aspect, that you love her with a self-denying, sacrificial love.

This is the most radical thing that the gospel has to say to a Christian man, to a Christian married man. You love by dying to yourself. To the unbelieving world, that is a conundrum. They cannot figure that out. But it is no riddle to the child of God who stands before the cross. We are to love. And then we understand that the love that we are to show always comes at the cost of our own self and our own pride. This is exactly what offends men. The gospel goes into all the world—into the United States, into India, into Asia, into Africa—and we hear that all cultures are equal and that we must leave these cultures alone. No, they are not. In Africa and Asia and the United States women are viewed as slaves to the pleasure of men. And the Christian gospel comes into those cultures and contradicts those cultures and says, “Man, you are to love her by dying to yourself. And find your treasure in the cross of Jesus Christ. How do you approach a woman? You must die to yourself. You must seek to lead, direct, counsel, comfort her in such a way that she grows up into her Lord Jesus Christ. You are a servant to her.”

May God give us to know what it means to love our wives even as Christ loved the church. May He give us to know that out of a rich experience of His grace—to know the love of Christ to us, to one so undeserving. And may God give us to measure our love by the sufferings of Jesus Christ. May our love, then, for our wife be a vocal love (that we *tell* her); a thoughtful love; a strong love in Christ that provides for her protection. For the church is certainly safe in the love of Jesus Christ. The church never need doubt the love of Jesus.

And may our love for our wives be practical. Maybe you come home and you say, “Honey, I’d die for you.” And there she is in the kitchen after a busy day, with all the kids and the supper dishes all around, and she responds, “Well, that’s nice, dear. But while you are waiting to die for me, would you please load the dishwasher?” That is the way you love your wife. You help her. You make your wife feel that she is treasured and that you will lay down your life for her in serving her spiritual good.

May God give us that kind of love.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word. It is a good Word to us—a Word that corrects us, a Word that always points us to the cross for our strength and for our forgiveness. Now, Lord, work profoundly in our hearts that we might humble ourselves daily before the cross, confess our pride and sin and live in that self-denying, sacrificial and wonderful love of Jesus Christ. We pray this in His name, Amen.