

A reading from the First Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

[Long Form]

Brothers and sisters:

Live in love, as Christ loved us

and handed himself over for us.

Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord.

For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the Church, he himself the savior of the body.

As the Church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the Church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

He who loves his wife loves himself.

For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his Body.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his

mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

This is a great mystery,

but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church.

In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband.

[Short Form]

Brothers and sisters:

Live in love, as Christ loved us

and handed himself over for us.

Husbands, love your wives,

even as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the Church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

He who loves his wife loves himself.

For no one hates his own flesh

but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his Body.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

This is a great mystery,

but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church.

The Word of the Lord. *R. Thanks be to God*

Commentary

Couples looking for a clear, strong image of sacramental marriage will gravitate toward this passage. It is the most expressive passage in the New Testament regarding marriage. It is also complex. Some couples will dismiss it as objectionable to a contemporary perspective of spousal love. The language within the reading can pose pastoral challenges. Yet couples who pray with this passage might trade in their initial objections for a spirited embrace of the vision of marriage offered here.

The author gives an extended meditation on the second creation story and quotes it directly (Genesis 2:18-24, 2nd Old Testament option). The author is very familiar with the Gospel of Christ Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead. Christ’s actions of suffering, dying, and rising make all the difference in the world, even to husbands and wives. The initial verse (2) indicates how to interpret this passage: “Live in love, as Christ loved us, and handed himself over for us.” Christ did this for the Church, the living body of believers. Married couples constitute the domestic church. Their mutual love should mirror the love Christ demonstrated. They are not expected to give their lives for the whole world, but they are to offer their lives for their spouse, the one they love. It is a love that is offered and given for another, or as the author states, “be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ” (vs. 21).

Some believe this passage unfairly treats women. The passage uses different verbs—to be subordinate, and to love—to describe the actions of wives and husbands, but the intent is the same. Both are to mutually give of themselves and freely love the other all for the sake and unity of their family.

The author stresses the unity present in all creation. When husbands and wives mutually give and love one another in a way that imitates Christ, they help to strengthen the unity in society. All is connected, and this exhortation to spouses to live as Christ is a part of his larger mission “to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth,” (1:10).

The shortened option removes the two more glaring references to subordinate wives. This might be the wiser option, especially if the person preaching does not intend to elaborate on this particular scriptural image.