

Christ And His Church

Dave Roberson

One of the most successful areas of Satan's operation is to somehow convince us that God is not going to provide for our necessities. Satan wants us to believe that we are fooling ourselves if we believe that God wants to work on our behalf in a mighty way. The enemy seeks to convince us that we are too far removed from the Lord to actually touch His heart.

But none of what the devil says is true. The love that caused Jesus to be impaled on the Cross is the same love that flows through Him today. Because of that love, He eagerly desires for us to receive what He has done for us - first, so we can be born again, but also so we can receive all the other benefits that accompany our salvation.

Then I received a wonderful revelation regarding Jesus' love for us as I was reading Ephesians chapter 5 concerning the marriage relationship. I finally understood what was really being said, and it startled me! The apostle Paul wasn't just talking about the marriage relationship between a man and a woman; he was also talking about the relationship between Christ and the Church. Ephesians 5:31,32 makes this clear:

“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

As the founder of the church at Ephesus, Paul had to deal with pagan cultures on a regular basis. One of the first foundational principles that had to be taught, therefore, was the marriage covenant: one man and one woman committed to each other and to their family.

Paul then went on to use marriage as an example to teach us about our relationship with Christ. Paul wanted to illustrate the closeness Jesus desires to have with us. In this intimate relationship, Jesus especially desires to meet our needs.

Be rest assured that by the time Paul wrote this epistle to the Ephesians, they had become well-versed in the teachings of marriage and family—so much so that Paul was able to use what they had already learned about the subject to teach them more about their relationship with Christ.

It wasn't the marriage covenant that the Ephesians were having trouble understanding; it was their position in Christ. This is why Ephesians is one of the most powerful books in the Bible concerning our relationship with Jesus.

Before we discuss what Paul says in Ephesians five about the marriage relationship, consider this: Of all the places Jesus could have chosen for His mother to spend her last days, He chose the Ephesian church—a church that understood the values of commitment and family. It was here in Ephesus that Mary lived out her days as the adopted mother of the apostle John. I am sure that Jesus had these values in mind when He provided for the welfare of His own mother, even as He hung on the Cross.

“When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! From that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.” (Jn. 19:26, 27).

Shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem, John took Mary and moved to Ephesus in Asia Minor, where he became pastor of the Ephesian church and overseer of the churches throughout the region. John treated Mary as his own mother until, at an old age, she died peacefully in his home. It was also here in Ephesus that John, the oldest living apostle, went home to be with the Lord in approximately 100 AD.

Now let's take a look at Ephesians 5. This chapter comes after Paul writes 4 incredible chapters in which he tells us exactly who we are in Christ Jesus. Now in chapter five; he is about to turn the tables and teach us exactly Who Jesus is in us. Paul does so by using the relationship between a man and a woman in the marriage covenant to illustrate the intimacy and closeness we can have with Jesus.

The modern Church seems to know very little about this principle of intimacy in the marriage relationship. Even in the Church, the divorce rate has climbed above 50 percent, and it's still climbing. No wonder Christians have trouble receiving from God! Families have become used to abandonment and betrayal. For many, a faithful bond between two people, including a mutual commitment to keep the marriage relationship alive and well, has become a thing of the past.

That's why it's important that we study this passage of Scripture. *First*, we need to gain a better understanding of God's order in the marriage relationship. *Second*, we need to connect this same passage to our personal relationship with Jesus. With this in mind, let's look at these verses very closely as we explore the message God is trying to get across to us: that no one has ever wanted to provide for us like Jesus does.

“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 husbands in everything.

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

“So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” (Eph. 5:22-32)

First, it is important to understand that the man has the privilege of being the priest of his home. And the first order of his priesthood is not only to provide a covering of love to which his wife can submit, but also to provide a covering for all her needs to be met in the natural.

Paul connects this principle to the spiritual relationship between Jesus and the Church 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.”

Jesus Christ is not only the Head or the covering of the Church, but He is also the Savior or the Provider of the Body. This means that under His covering as the Head, Jesus has also provided for every need the Church could possibly have, including an abiding sense of peace and security.

Jesus has promised to meet all the needs of the Church according to His riches in glory. That means He has provided for our well-being by destroying the hold of sickness and disease over us. He has also given us power over all the enemy's power so that Satan cannot in anyway harm us.

Jesus is truly the Savior of the Body. He loves His Church more than any man could love his wife. In fact, He loves the Church so much that He said, "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (v. 28,29). Jesus is saying here that He so loves the Church, He has become "one" with her.

We are members of Jesus' Body—flesh of His flesh; bone of His bone. If Jesus were to fail to meet our needs, it would be the same as failing to meet His own needs. If He were to fail to love us, it would be the same as failing to love Himself. If Jesus didn't nourish and cherish us, it would be the same as denying Himself, for what He desires most is to enjoy an intimate relationship and close fellowship with us.

So we see that Paul used the covenant between husband and wife as a parallel illustration of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Paul also used Jesus' role as a covering for the Church to demonstrate how the husband, as head of the home, is to be a covering and provider for his wife.

Jesus wants to fellowship with us and to show us how much it delights Him when we feel the intimacy and security of His covering. He wants us to feel free to bring all our needs to Him. He wants us to know that nothing we need, no matter how great or small, is ever a bother to Him, for as a husband should be with his wife, so Jesus nourishes and cherishes us.

As our covering, Jesus is also our Provider; therefore, He is delighted when we fellowship with Him. It blesses Him when we come to Him concerning our needs as a wife might do with her husband.

When a husband demonstrates his willingness to fulfill his commitment to his wife by covering her and providing for her needs, she then comes to him with a list of the things she desires. Her needs didn't bring them together in the first place. It was only after they fell in love with each other and decided to spend their lives together that she felt free to express her needs. But the husband doesn't mind when his wife comes to him with a need, because it is his desire to be with her. In fact, he has found that meeting his wife's needs has resulted in wonderful times of fellowship with her.

For the wife's part, she doesn't mind being under her husband's covering, because it means

spending time with him. She doesn't meet him at the door when he comes home just so she can see what might be in his hands to give to her. Rather, she meets him at the door out of her desire to be with him.

This is why Paul talked about divine order in the marriage relationship to the Ephesian church. If the Ephesian believers couldn't understand the relationship between husband and wife, it would have been difficult for them to understand their relationship with Christ as Head of the Church and, consequently, as their Provider.

God set a divine order both in the home and in the Church so a man could understand how to submit himself to Christ. First, a man must understand that his responsibility as the head of the family and the priest of the home is to love his wife and to cover her by providing for her every need. As the husband seeks to fulfill this role in the home, he can then understand how much it means to Jesus as Head of to have with each of us. In this intimate relationship, Jesus especially desires to meet our needs.

Paul also taught on divine order in First Corinthians 11, using the strong descriptive word "dishonors" to show how intensely God desires for His people to take their place in His appointed order. Once this divine order is established in a couple's home, God is then able to meet their needs, and the husband is able to meet his wife's needs.

Let's look at these verses very closely:

“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.” (1 Corinthians 11:3,4).

Many have wondered what Paul means in verse 4 when he says, Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, *dishonoreth* his head. Paul isn't saying that God won't use this man. As the verse says, the man both prays and prophesies. But this same man breaches divine order when he allows a woman to cover him—to become his provider by taking on the role of supplying the family's needs while he himself remains dependent on her supply. Jesus wants us to know that a man in this position has his head covered by his wife. Therefore, the Head he is actually dishonoring is his Head, Jesus Christ.

Paul isn't talking about whether or not the man wears a hat; Paul is talking about whether or not that man is fulfilling divine order in his home. Is this man meeting the needs of his family by covering them as Christ covers the Church? A negative answer to this question is extremely dishonoring to Christ. Why? Because as the Head of the Church, Jesus would never think of failing to fulfill His commitment to provide for the needs of His Body. As Ephesians 5:23 says, For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour provider of the body.

The man who loves his wife would no more think of neglecting her needs than Jesus would fail to meet the needs of the Church. Our failure as Christians to understand this truth is one of the biggest problems in the Body of Christ. Most of us are unaware that one of the greatest provisions Jesus has made for the Church is that we are under His covering. As the husband is to the wife, so is Jesus to the Church. He is our Provider.

Sometimes when we go to Jesus, we don't simply present Him with a need and then enter into a time of fellowshiping with Him and thanking Him for meeting that need. Instead of honoring Him as a good Provider and worshiping Him as someone who already has made provision, we spend our time begging and trying to get Jesus to do something for us. When we act like that, we are actually treating Him as a bad Provider.

When a husband is a good provider in the marriage relationship, his wife never has to come and beg him to meet her needs or the needs of the family. She has all the confidence in the world that her husband will meet her needs because he knows her and loves her, and he knows that she loves him.

Just as a wife learns to submit to her husband as her provider and to fellowship with him concerning her needs, Jesus is trying to teach us how to submit to Him as our Provider and to fellowship with Him. But to do that, somewhere along the way we are going to have to get to know Him.

Although the wife comes to love, honor, and respect her husband, she does not worship him, nor does he become her God. Their relationship with each other is in the realm of the soul- and on this earth, few things are stronger than a soul connection such as the one between a husband and wife. On the other hand, the husband or wife's worship belongs to God and God only.

God demonstrated this in the Garden of Eden when He said, It is not good that the man should be alone ... (Genesis 2:18). Adam was in perfect fellowship with God, so how could God call him alone? God wasn't saying that Adam's *spirit* was alone, but his *soul*. God therefore created a woman to establish a soul relationship with His man. From that moment on, Adam and Eve had one another to meet their mutual need for fellowship and intimacy on the level of the soul.

As natural beings, this is the level on which we communicate and interact with each other. But as spiritual beings, we communicate with God on the level of our *spirits*.

The highest level of fellowship with God is worship. However, I am not referring to worship with other believers in a public assembly. I thank God for these public worship services, but I am talking about private worship here. This is when we find a place where we can be alone with God to worship Him from the inner sanctuary of our own hearts. 'Sometimes that place is a room; sometimes it is a literal closet. For some of us, it may even be in our car.

It is simply amazing what thirty to sixty minutes of pure worship will do for your relationship with God. I promise you this: If you only understood the results produced when you go into your private place to worship God, you'd realize that this practice should rank at the very top of your list of priorities. Nothing is greater in importance or results than private worship, whether you are a businessman, preacher, housewife, or prophet.

But there is a spirit of lack that controls the level of blessing in many believers' lives simply because they do not understand this truth and they are ignorant of the way that Satan operates. They don't understand that the enemy wants them to agree with his words of defeat about their lives. If he succeeds in his strategy, these believers will close the windows of Heaven in regard to their personal needs—and they will do it with the words of their own mouths. The "spirit of lack" is a professional. He knows just how to come in at an opportune moment and start screaming about the hopeless state of our circumstances. He will bombard our minds

with accusing questions, such as, *Where is God in all this? Why isn't He moving on your behalf?* Because this enemy is a spirit, we hear him with our spiritual ears, not our physical ears. His voice grates across our minds with a continual stream of harassing and tormenting thoughts that set up a series of extremely strong, negative emotions. If we don't recognize the source of this emotional onslaught, we are more prone to buckle under the weight of it.

Because of the way the spirit of lack operates, he is highly successful at deceiving believers into cooperating with him. And as soon as they yield to his pressure and start agreeing with his words of defeat, he is then able to start the process of shutting down their spiritual supply lines.

This is why Jesus was so adamant in His instructions to believers of all ages when He exhorted them to "take no thought" about getting their basic needs met. In Matthew 6:25, Jesus said, "Therefore, I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"

In fact, Jesus became even more explicit as He came to the end of His message: "Therefore, take no thought saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? Or wherewithal shall we be clothed? (v. 34).

Why did Jesus say, ... Take no thought saying what shall we eat ... ? Because thoughts like these usually have a satanic origin. He wouldn't have told us to avoid taking the care of such thoughts if they didn't have the power to hinder our relationship with Him.

If we have been fellow-shipping with a spirit of lack in certain areas of our lives, the necessary changes that must take place in those areas generally cannot be done in our own strength. That is why we so desperately need to make an appointment with God in order to begin fellowshipping in private worship with Him.

You will find that at times it will take all the faith you have to keep your appointment with God lift up your hands in worship to Him. When fighting this good fight of faith, it will sometimes feel as if a ton of emotional lead were on each hand. But remember, what you are really fighting is that unseen force—the spirit of lack that wants to prevent life-giving change from coming to your circumstances.

Here is an important principle for winning this fight of faith that I can share with you from personal experience: **BECOME THANKFUL RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE FOR WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE.**

This is why Paul said to Timothy in First Timothy 6:6-8:

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content."

Blessings from Tom & Linda Stephens

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