

## Series B: Proper 16—As Christ and His Bride

Vicar Raymond Doubrava  
August 26, 2018

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When Martin Luther wrote his small catechism, one of the sections that he included in it was a table of duties. In it, he wrote nothing of his own, but merely compiled what scripture has to say about how we as Christians are to live our lives, our duties to one another. One of the texts from which Luther cited was our Epistle reading for today.

There has, however, been a push in modern day society, to say that such passages of scripture are no longer relevant to Christians today. If you look at the Revised Common Lectionary, the lectionary that many protestant churches use if they use a lectionary, you will see that none of the passages of the table of duties appear in the Sunday readings. This is nothing other than a confession that these portions of scripture do not apply to Christians today and thus there is no reason for them to be read on Sunday mornings.

The reason that Christians are so eager to dismiss these portions of scripture is because we don't like authority. We don't like the idea that we aren't the most knowledgeable regarding something. Sure, we'll take J.K. Rowling's word as authoritative on Harry Potter or George Lucas's word as authoritative on Star Wars because they are the authors of that material. But take as authoritative God our Creator and what He, as the author of Holy Scripture, has written down for us? Bah! Humbug! Surely, we as 21<sup>st</sup> century people have more knowledge than the Apostles and Prophets who wrote God's word down. Surely these things written don't have any binding force on us today. I mean, honestly, don't they just seem so primitive?

But this is nothing new. Challenging the authority of God is the oldest temptation in the book. Go back to the Garden of Eden. Satan tempted Eve saying, "**Did God actually say...?**" (Ge 3:1). So likewise, we are still tempted today to say, "Meh, I don't like what this portion of scripture says, so I'll just scratch it out of my bible and ignore it."

Jesus, however, warns that we cannot call any of scripture void. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, He says, "**For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.**" (Mt 5:18). If not even one iota or dot will pass away from the Law until all is accomplished, then how can say that we have any right to remove whole verses of scripture, simply because we disagree with the message that they have? The fact is that we can't, and thus these passages of scripture are binding on us just as any other part of scripture is.

Part of our fear of authority is that we see it so frequently abused. Living in the #MeToo era, week after week we get new reports of people of both genders who have abused their authority to sexually assault other people. Or look at politics of any country and you see it there too. Because we live in a sinful world, authority, which is gifted by God, is easily abused by those who have it.

And that is why Paul writes here in Ephesians and elsewhere, as well as Peter in his first epistle, on the roles and responsibilities that those in authority have and those who are subject to authorities have. They know that authority is frequently abused, and so they teach Christians the proper use of it. Paul, in our Epistle reading from today, focuses in on three relationships: wives & husbands; children & parents; and bondservants & masters. These three relationships are the fundamental building blocks of a well-ordered society. Without family and employment, society goes nowhere.

The fundamental building block to a well-ordered society, then, is marriage. Even before the fall, God made man and woman to be joined together as one flesh for their entire lives. It is upon this relationship that all of society is built. But the model that Paul gives here of what a marriage looks like is not that of Adam and Eve, nor is it that of Abraham and Sarah. No, here Paul shows the perfect marriage as the union of Christ with His Bride the Church.

Christ, as the head of His Church, "**loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.**" (Eph 5:25-27). Christ died so that His Bride, the Church, would live. And Christ called you in the waters of Holy Baptism with the Word to be a member of His bride, without spot or wrinkle. Thus, we see that Christ died so that you may live. And the Church holds fast to Christ's teaching. The church subjects herself to Him knowing that He is leading her in paths of righteousness.

Thus, as it is with Christ and the Church, so it is to be among human relationships. Husbands are to show the love of Christ to their wives by loving her as himself to the point that he would willingly lay down his lives for their wife. Husbands also are to nourish and cherish their wives, "**for,**" as Paul writes, "**no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.**" (Eph 5:29-30). A good and faithful husband treats his wife as his own flesh for, in holy matrimony, the two indeed become one flesh.

The wife, then, is called to subject herself to her husband as the Church subjects itself to Christ and as all Christians subject themselves to one another. This does not mean, however, that Paul thinks that women are inferior to their husbands, but simply that they have separate roles. When we think of women being subject to their husbands, our minds go back to the Victorian period when women were seen as inferior to men, porcelain dolls, fragile things that couldn't do anything.

But if you look in the bible, you see that is far from what it shows of women. Take Proverbs 31, which says, "**She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard,**" (Pr 31:16) and also, "**She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue,**" (Pr 31:26) just to pull a couple verse out of it. Far from inferior either socially or intelligently, the Bible paints women as vital to the well-being of the family and society. God has given wives different roles from husbands. Husbands love, protect, sacrifice, nourish, cherish their wives. This they do so that their wives can be free to help properly bring up a family and can work for the betterment of the household. Both are equally vital members of the body. The head has no life without a body, and same for the body without a head. Likewise, husband and wife, being one flesh, having different roles as head and body, work together as one to bring about the betterment of society as a whole.

It is from this union, then, of husband and wife as one flesh, that the next group comes, and that is children and parents. Children are to obey their parents in the Lord. Just as a wife looks to her husband to see a representation of the love that Christ has for the church, so children ought to look to their parents and see that same love reflected, not only between husband and wife, but also between parents and children. This includes the children listening to and obeying their parents just as we as Christians listen to and obey God's word. It also means that parents don't provoke anger in their children but discipline and instruct them in the Lord. Discipline is not only punishing wrongdoing, but also training

them on what they are to do, and then also instructing and warning them of what they are not to do. This is done just as God instructs us, His children. Therefore, it is so very important that parents spend time not only bringing their children with them to church and Sunday School, but also teach them the bible and the catechism at home. This is part of parents owe their children.

The final relationship that Paul talks about is that of bondservants and masters, and what Paul says here applies to employees and employers as well. Again, both employee and employer are to show the relationship of the Church to Christ. The employee shows it by serving their employer as the church serves Christ. This includes serving "**with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord.**" (Eph 6:5-8). And employers are to do the same, for both have the same Master in Heaven. Here, notice that neither side is reflecting Christ. Instead, they are both reflecting the role of the church to one another. This is because there is typically no love between employee and employer, but there is obedience to one another, just as the bride of Christ is obedient to her head.

Authority is given for our benefit. It leads to a well-ordered society. And when we as Christians assume our proper roles as wife and husband, child and parent, employee and employer, we see that society is improved in how it runs. In so doing, we reflect the love of Christ for His Church and the obedience and service of the church to Christ her head. And so, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, go and live reflecting the relations of Christ and His Bride to the world, and by so doing, witnessing to the love that Christ has shown you in His laying down His life for you.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.