

Celebrate God's Gift of Marriage

- ✦ **...being filled with the Spirit...(v.21)**
- ✦ **...wives as the bride of Christ...(vv.22-24)**
- ✦ **...husbands as the Christ-like groom...(v.25-31)**

In the name of Jesus, our heavenly Bridegroom, dear holy bride of Christ:

Will you, take ___ to be your wife? Will you be guided by the counsel and direction God has given in his Word and love your wife as Christ loved the Church? Will you be faithful to her, cherish her, support her, and help her in sickness and in health as long as you both shall live? If so, answer, "I will."

Will you, take ___ to be your husband? Will you be guided by the counsel and direction God has given in his Word and submit to your husband as the Church submits to Christ? Will you be faithful to him, cherish him, support him, and help him in sickness and in health as long as you both shall live? If so, answer, "I will."¹

Who makes wedding vows without sincerely wanting this with all their heart and soul? We want the best for our dearest. So why is marriage so difficult? Why so undesirable in our culture? Hollywood movies like *He's Just Not That Into You* always make marriage the problem. Sinful man can't see this. God's Word shows us our real problem is sin. Better yet, the real solution is our Savior and heavenly Bridegroom. Married or single, Jesus helps us **Celebrate God's Gift of Marriage...**

✦ ...being filled with the Spirit...(v.21)

English punctuation wants to chop up Paul's long sentences like the one ending in verse 21. But the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write in the style of a learned Jewish rabbi. So back in verse 18, we're told instead of being filled up with wine, to be "filled up with the Holy Spirit." The participles of verses 19-21 all explain how this happens. We fill up with the Spirit by *hearing, singing and meditating* on God's Word – and by *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*. This verse is a bridge from general Christian living to family. Sin ruins everything with "My way or the highway." Sin makes everything about "Me!" Selfishness destroys all relationships – married or single, church or family.

But look at Jesus. He never made anything about Himself. His whole life was about honoring His heavenly Father in order to be our Savior. As a pre-teen in the temple Jesus honored his mother who publicly scolded Him for staying in church too long. He answered respectfully, then went home and submitted to them out of reverence for God. He's not just a good example. Jesus is our Substitute under God's law keeping it perfectly in our place. Jesus is the only reason we can go on with the following verses and learn to **Celebrate God's Gift of Marriage.**

✦ ...wives as the bride of Christ...(vv.22-24)

Was this ever popular since the Fall? ***"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything."***

"For the married (5:22-33), the relationship between Christ and his church is the pattern of their life together. The wife is to submit to her husband as to the Lord, happy to take her lead from him. Does

¹ CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE. *Christian Worship – A Lutheran Hymnal*. (NPH, 1993), pp. 141f.

*this make us moderns wince? Not when she keeps the church and Christ as her model. Not when her husband lives according to the much longer exhortation to love his wife as Christ loves the church, always looking out for her interests ahead of his own. Their marriage is neither her burden nor his dictatorship, but is rather their shared reflection of what Jesus has done for them both.”*²

What makes this difficult for a woman? Isn't it fear that her husband might take advantage of her? But look again at Jesus. As God's life-giving Word, He empowers God-fearing women in spite of their sinful husbands. Remember beautiful and intelligent Abigail? She triumphed over her *fool*-husband Nabal in 1 Samuel 25. Abigail coolly and calmly rescued David and his men from the sin of vengeance and the men in her family from slaughter. The next day she showed her submission to the LORD and her sobered-up husband by telling him what she did. Finally God killed Nabal and let Abigail marry David.

Are the stereotypes true? In the movie, *He's Just Not That Into You*, Jennifer Aniston's character is caring for her father after his heart attack. Meanwhile, her married brothers and brothers-in-law are all watching sports. Their wives are crying. Finally boyfriend Ben Affleck shows up to help. Marriage is not the problem or the solution. Sin is the problem and here is God's solution:

✠ ...husbands as the Christ-like groom...(v.25-31)

Have the groom hold a pitcher in both hands. Tell him it's a priceless vase from the Ming Dynasty. Without dropping the priceless Ming, try to move a chair with your feet. After a struggle: "This is *agape-love* Christ commands for husbands, *love* that attaches special value to the wife and treats her as his most priceless treasure." To the bride: "And Christ-like '*submission*' means you *let him*."³

"If a husband hurts his wife, he hurts himself. If a man hurts himself, he is very foolish. The only people who constantly are hurting themselves are joggers."⁴ So a warning from the Lord's Apostle Peter: "**Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect** (τιμῆν) **as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.**" (1 Peter 3:7 NIV84)

To make clean, cleanse, purify – After her boyfriend's kindness Jennifer Aniston is ready to give in and live together unmarried. Is that God's solution – or just more sin? But Ben Affleck's proposal is classic: "I want you to be happy. And I can't begin to be happy unless you are." They get married.

Fear stops husbands from *agape-love*, fear the wife may take advantage if he's weak. But look again at Jesus. He takes away all our fear by His perfect love that drives out fear. From one of Luther's classic sermons, here's the love of our heavenly Bridegroom for His Church:

"...What does he give us then? Himself, wholly and completely. He does not cut a piece off for me or give me a little morsel, but the whole fountain of eternal wisdom, not a little brooklet....If he gave me only a part of his wisdom, righteousness and life, I would say: That is of no help to me, but I want you, without you nothing is real and true...."

"Now, what do we bring to him? Nothing but all our heart-aches, all our misfortunes, sins, misery and lamentations. He is the eternal light, we the eternal darkness; he the life, we death; he righteousness, we sin. This is a marriage that is very unequal. But what does the bridegroom do? He is so [caring] that he will not dwell with his bride until he first adorns her in the highest degree. How is that done? The Apostle Paul teaches that when he says in Titus 3:5-7: 'He gave his tender body into death for them through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.' He instituted a washing; that washing is baptism, with which he washes her. More than this, he has given to her his

² Daniel N. Balge: "Have this letter read to all," *Forward in Christ*, June 2014, p. 33.

³ Premarital counseling and encouragement for married couples from Pastor Charlie Degner, St. Peter, MN.

⁴ Classic Irwin Habek at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.

Word; in that she believes and through her faith she becomes a bride. The bridegroom comes with all his treasures; but I come with all my sins, with all my misery and heart-griefs. But because this is a marriage and a union, in the sense that they become one flesh, Gen. 2,24; Mat. 19,5, and they leave father and mother and cleave to one another, they should embrace each other and not disown one another, although one is even a little sick and awkward; for what concerns one, the other must also bear.

*“...Therefore my death thus vanishes in his life, my sins in his righteousness and my condemnation in his salvation.... For now since my sin, my filth is taken away he must adorn and clothe me with his eternal righteousness and with all his grace until I become beautiful; for I am his bride...”*⁵

“What God has joined together...” Hollywood always ends in confusion. Their best is only guess-work: “Maybe it’s just... this/that...” Read the Holy Spirit’s wisdom and see how **“the two shall be one.”** He shows the way by faith in Christ and by the Gospel powers you along the path of blessing.

Are your marriage wheels out of alignment? We need the Master Mechanic of our souls to set things right again. He has the tools and instruments, the skill and love to unite our hearts first with God and then with each other. With Word and sacrament He guides us smoothly along life’s highway with Christ in the driver’s seat. This is how we roll together. Daily personal devotions, coupled with prayers and Bible readings unite our hearts with God and each other. Home worship goes hand-in-hand with faithful Bible class and church attendance. **Celebrate God’s Gift of Marriage.** God wants others to take notice and be blessed too – for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

⁵ *Sermons of Martin Luther*, a.k.a. “Luther’s Postil.” John Nicholas Lenker, ed. TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, Matthew 22:1-14. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, re-printed 1988, Vol. V, pp. 231-234.
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