

# 'Have reverence for Christ'

Evensong Sermon by the Rev Derek Lightbourne, St James Lower Hutt 11 October 2020

Keynote Bible passages: Ephesians 5.21 – 6.9, Mark 3. 31 – 35

Every time there's a royal wedding the media make great play about whether the prospective wife will 'love, cherish and obey'.. , while the prospective husband vows to 'love and cherish'... Wherefore this 'obedience'? Surprising it may seem but this isn't in scripture, it more derives from the Marriage Service in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

## 1) Context

As this evening we consider the Ephesians passage on relationships it is really important to see what it actually stated, having careful regard for the context. The section begins, and this is the *theme of the Sermon*, '*Having reverence for Christ.*' It is this both husband and wife are called to. Indeed the teaching is well paraphrased in The Message – 'Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another.' And continuing, 'Petersen writes 'Wives understand and support your husbands *in ways that show your support for Christ.* The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to the church, not by domineering but by cherishing.' End of quote. Surely most of us could go with that. Thus the 'being subject' is in the context of how a person would be in relation to Jesus – 'be subject to your husbands *as you are to the Lord.*'

To extend this as a metaphor, one Bible commentator writes that 'Paul urges marriage partners to be imitators of God and live a life of love quoting from Chapter 5:1: 'Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us , a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.' Thus to live as Christ lived and love as Christ loved. The marriage relationship and the way it functions is meant to demonstrate the relationship between Christ and the church.

## 2) Christ and the church.

As I prepared this sermon, as well as taking into account the misunderstanding, I became very aware of the key statement applying as it does, with the Epistle focussing on the close relationship between Christ and the church. There are several mentions of this closeness including 'Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word...' And 'Christ is the head of the church...

And a little further on, how 'Christ nourishes the church and tenderly cares for it'. And then is interwoven the marriage relationship; as a great mystery' - 'A man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery and I am *applying it to Christ and the church.*'

Thus in the passage we are reminded of the closeness of Christ and his church. To begin to understand this we need to remember Jesus in his earthly ministry, he appointed 12 not only to be followers but also as Mark notes, 'to be with me'. Included in this close relationship with Jesus are others – witness the second reading from Mark's gospel when he is questioned about his mother and

brothers and sisters. Jesus responds, 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? Whoever does what God wants is my mother, my sister, my brother.'

Having reverence for Christ – may I ask, what do you value about church? Might I venture to suggest it is to 'love and to cherish.

For me here's what comes to mind. First is the *membership*, as we meet together. Zooming when we had to was a helpful means of communication and indeed worship, but meeting in person, now its over is even more fulfilling. Lockdown, if anything, made us aware of just how much we missed, and appreciate one another.

A second aspect, while we each do have our respective beliefs, there's so much in common in living by *Christian values*. May I recall from last months section: 'Be careful how you live. Don't live like ignorant people, but as wise. Make good use of every opportunity you have, because these are evil days....try to find out what the Lord wants you to do.....Be filled with the Spirit'.

Then there's *worship*. 'Speak to one another with the words of psalms, hymns and sacred songs; sing hymns and psalms to the Lord with praise in your hearts. And a fourth aspect is *thankfulness*. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, always give thanks for everything to God our Father.' (5.15 – 20).

And may I further suggest with that, *appreciation*. Again lockdown did have a positive with more time to appreciate, be it the beauty of creation, of friendship, with prayer and meditation. 'Give thanks for everything'.

So then, valuing being members one of another, values by which we live, worship, praise and thankfulness.

### 3) Family relationships

Now we can consider the *specific categories* from the passage – husbands and wives have been considered in connection with the relationship between Christ and the church.

Then follows teaching for *children and parents*. Honour is one translation, or respect, with calm discipline, not provoking anger. Yes, they are relevant for today in family. Note how it expresses the relationship – as 'in the Lord', in which as Christian parents we have sought to raise our children. We may be a little distanced with grandchildren, yet I believe it's really important to support and affirm our own children in their parenting.

We could consider the final category mentioned of *slaves and masters* but that's in historical context. I'm mindful of the very short letter of the escaped slave Philemon and Paul's asking for fair treatment. Modern day slavery has no reason to exist and is wrong on all counts.

### Concluding

And so the teaching on relationships concludes. And there's a link with the final section of the letter, to 'Build up your strength in union with the Lord and by means of his mighty power.' We conclude where we began, being in and building relationship. We are to follow the example of Christ Jesus as believers, members of the church, Christ's own body.

