

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. So we have here Jesus, of course, talking again to the scribes and the Pharisees and to the people and giving them some hard things to swallow. Now, this immediately is still following after the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus walking on the water, him telling the people that they need to eat his body and drink his blood, and everybody having a hard time with that saying, and then this is a continuation, at least in the book. This is what John follows with. And so the Pharisees and the scribes are having a real hard time because the disciples are not following after the traditions of men. See, it's not that the disciples were eating with really filthy and disgusting hands. That's not really what we're talking about here. It's just simply that they didn't do the ceremonial washing that the Pharisees expected.

You see, the Pharisees were all about showing themselves to be holy in front of everybody else. And so this was a ritual that made it clear that they were above everybody else, that they understood the law more deeply than anyone else. And it was a tradition that they had practiced. And so they did a great big show of washing their hands so that everybody knew, oh, they really, really, really are good people as opposed to the rest of us who don't remember all the time. It's kind of like coming to church and making sure you're wearing your nicest clothes and everything like that.

And making sure everybody in your neighborhood sees you as you leave on Sunday morning so that they know that you've gone to church and therefore you've done your duty and you've followed the law. But the problem with all of this is they were doing it merely for show. They were doing it merely so that other people might praise them and they were doing it because they thought by doing it that they were fulfilling God's law and doing what was right. In other words, they thought that they could do it by word and deed and that it was enough. They were focused upon their own actions rather than upon what God desired for them.

They didn't understand what it meant to listen to the word of God. They're like, what... I mean, Jesus quoted from Isaiah here that they follow them with their lips and with their mouths and their tongues, but not with their heart. And I like the way Isaiah describes it. This is how the people of Israel, and quite frankly all of us at times listen to God's word. It's as if there's a book and we can read it, but it's sealed. So I'm sorry I can't read the book. Or we get a book I can't read. In other words, Isaiah was saying the Israelites are making all sorts of foolish and silly excuses as to why they can't really listen to God's word and follow it. Oh, is it sealed? I can't read it. Oh, I can't read, or whatever else they might think of. And then later on he describes it as if a potter or a piece of pottery is talking to the potter and saying, you don't understand how it is to live my life.

I mean, think about this. We are pottery. Literally, God created us out of the ground, the dust of the ground, the clay of the ground. He formed us and made us living creatures. And we as the pottery in essence, are looking at God and saying, "You just don't understand me." How brazen and how obnoxious is that? And yet, that's what the Israelites were doing in Isaiah's Day. That's what the Jewish people, the scribes and the Pharisees were doing in Jesus' day. And quite frankly, it's what we do today. Whenever we doubt or question God, whenever we follow after the commands of God, whenever we look at the 10 Commandments and we think, oh, I have to do them because that's the right thing to do. Or I'm not going to do something because I don't want to get punished, rather than understanding what God's law is all about. God did not give us the law to be a killjoy.

He did not give us the 10 Commandments so that we might have to always be looking over his shoulder thinking, did I do right? Am I in the right way? That's not what the law of God is about. If we are thinking that God is constantly looking at us and judging us, we are missing the point. The law of God is good and wise. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Obviously, the fear of God means something other than to cower and terror. Because as Luther said in his Catechism, you should have no other gods except me. What does this mean? We should fear, love and trust in God above all things. The fear of God leads to the love of God. It doesn't lead to cowering and questioning anything. So we need to understand that the word of God, the law of God is good.

It is useful for us. As scripture says, for instruction, reproof and gaining in wisdom. Instead, we often look at the law as something that we have to obey because it's the right thing to do, or if not, God is going to be mad at us. And we follow it as if this is the traditions of man, not the traditions of God. Which is kind of like what happens when we look at the Ephesians passage, "Wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord." And as soon as I say that, you can feel the air just bristle. You're like, oh, what is going on here?

Don't you know women's rights and don't you know that women are equal with men and they're equally as smart and equally as capable and so on and so forth? Yes, absolutely. That's true. And so is this scripture passage. This is not a commandment that man made up to subject women to a life of servitude to their husbands. As it is often applied and understood falsely in the world and unfortunately sometimes in the church, submission is not cowering in fear or being silent and just obeying everything that your husband has to say. Because let's face it, the husband doesn't always know what he's talking about.

I mean, let's be honest here. Let's be honest here. Sometimes the husband gets it wrong, sometimes the husband doesn't understand, okay? This is true for all of us. So it's not about submission because he's superior and you must obey him. Look at

what it says to the husband, "Husband's love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." This whole concept of submission and love is based upon God's relationship through Christ to the church. This really isn't primarily about your relationship with your husband or your relationship with your wife. It's primarily about understanding the relationship of God with his church. The Father sent his son to die for us. God has given us his gifts in baptism, in the Lord's Supper, in the words of absolution. He has shown love to us every single day of our lives. He gives us all that we need to support this body in life.

He promises us eternal life, salvation, the forgiveness of sins. He descended into the hell to defeat Satan, death and hell itself so that we do not need to be afraid of any of that when we die. Is it an onerous burden for the church to praise God and to submit to His word? If it is, you don't understand his word. Is it an onerous burden to come here to church on Sunday morning because well, I'd better? Or is it a joy because here is where we receive the gifts that God has promised to especially give to us.

See, we are here because of the joy of our salvation, and we willingly and joyfully listen to God's word to hear about how we are called to submit to him out reverence for Christ, out of reverence for what he has done. We honor our father and mother, not because we must, but because that is the way that we show that we understand God's love for us, by giving us the parents. We honor our wives and we do not... Our spouses and we do not commit adultery because that is a way that we show that we love God and we understand the gift that he has given to us of our spouse.

These are things we do out of joy in thanksgiving, not out of obligation and fear. And these are things that God has given to us because they are good. We have a wonderful God who has made it very clear what he expects. There is no ambiguity with God, and that is unusual in religion and what a joy it is. Husbands love your wives, listen to them, understand them. Your job is to make sure that they're held up with splendor, that they are protected, that they are cared for, that they have everything that they need. You are to give up your life as Christ gave up for the church and wives, because Christ has done all of that for you. And because your husbands are called to protect you, you are called to submit to them. Not because of any obligation, but because this is the joy of both of the parties, husband and wife, remembering the sentence that comes before this reading, which we read last week.

Last week, the last sentence that we read in the epistle lesson was submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. In other words, we submit to each other. Husbands by loving their wives and wives by respecting and submitting to their husbands. This is about our relationship with God first and foremost. Because

when we can understand how God has loved us and we understand what he has done for the church, then we demonstrate that by living our lives and our marriage life in the same manner. It's really about us understanding what God has done and how much he loves us. And husbands, you can demonstrate that by acting Christ-like in your marriage. And wives, you can do that by acting like the church in your marriage and loving and caring for your Savior and your Lord. You can do that by loving and caring for and respecting your husband.

It is a means by which we demonstrate that we understand God's word for us. This is not man's way of putting half of the species down or controlling them. This is a means by which we understand God's relationship with us. I mean, notice he says, "I'm primarily this mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." And he says that right after the husband and wife become one flesh. In essence, Christ became one flesh with us. Think about that. God himself became a man, a flesh like us. Joined himself forever with humanity. For what purpose? So that he might suffer and die for humanity. So that he might save humanity. So that he might give humanity hope. Or better yet, that he might give you and me hope. That is what this is all about, understanding the great and profound mystery of the love of God.

And instead of just doing it by rote responsibility, we do it because we love God. Now, the Pharisees and the scribes, they just did not understand this. And I love the way this is described because... Listen to this. If you would read it in the Greek, you would hear this every time we hear the word wash. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they baptize their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they baptize. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as baptizing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches. The word baptizo in the Greek is to wash. And so they were washing all sorts of things physically, but they were missing out on what baptism really is about, about the word of God, cleansing them of their sins. They didn't understand what God was talking about, "Wash me and I shall be clean." It's not a ceremonial demonstration of your faithfulness to God, it's rather God's cleansing of you.

And so we understand the depth of the word of God for us, that he loves us, that he's become flesh for us, and that he offers us his body and blood for our grace, mercy, and peace. And so, one of the ways along with all the rest of the commands is to love our wives and to respect our husbands. To submit and to sacrifice for each other out of reverence for Christ. Because his word sustains us and nourishes us every single day. And we do not need to be afraid. So let us rejoice in the law of God, rejoice in the gift he has given because it is a great and marvelous thing to know how much God loves us.

AUGUST 25, 2024 SERMON

May his grace and his mercy and his peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.