

Samson and His Wife, Philistinism, and the Mind of Christ

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Ephesians 5 — The Standard and the Spiral

Ephesians 5:25–33 sets the standard for the Christian household in terms that are impossible to reach by human effort alone. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. Both standards are infinite. Any level of love a husband might reach and say, now I have loved well enough, falls short — because the measure is as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Any degree of submission a wife might reach and say, now I have submitted enough, falls short — because the measure is as the church is subject to Christ, in everything.

But the practical outworking of these two things in a Christian household has a character that is important to understand: it spirals. When a husband expresses genuine love toward his wife, it becomes easier for her to render submission. When she renders submission, it becomes easier for him to express love. Each turn of the spiral upward makes the next turn easier. And the same spiral can go the other direction: when the wife withholds submission because the husband has not been sweet to her, the husband feels it and becomes colder, which gives her further reason to withhold, which makes him colder still. There is no bottom to that descending spiral either.

The standard, because it is infinite, provides no resting place in either direction. There is no point at which the husband can say, I have loved sufficiently, or the wife say, I have submitted sufficiently. The Christian marriage is always in

motion — either growing toward the standard or receding from it.

Mr. and Mrs. Samson — One of the Worst Husbands and One of the Worst Wives

Judges 14 provides an Old Testament example that illuminates Ephesians 5 from the negative side. Samson went down to Timnath — three times in the passage he goes down, and down in Scripture carries a moral weight as well as a literal one, as Jonah went down to Joppa to flee from the Lord. The motive from the beginning was the lust of the eyes: the woman pleased him well. Her father and mother were set aside. There was a lion in the path — Satan going about as a roaring lion — and Samson killed it with the Spirit's strength and said nothing to anyone about it.

The wedding feast of seven days exposed everything. Samson proposed a riddle; the thirty Philistine companions could not solve it and threatened his wife. She wept before him for seven days, saying: thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not. And on the seventh day he told her, because she lay sore upon him. She told the companions. He paid the forfeit with anger, went up to his father's house in a huff, and the wife was given by her father to the companion whom Samson had used as his friend.

Samson was certainly not a loving husband. He pleased himself throughout. And Samson's wife was certainly not a submissive wife — she caused all her husband's plans and thoughts to come to ruin by telling the secret he had kept even from his own parents. What she said to him — thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not — was a false accusation, manipulative and self-serving. And yet, the Scripture consistently calls her Samson's wife, even in chapter 15 when she had been given to another. He came back with a kid. The father-in-law said: I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her, therefore I gave her to thy companion.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it. — Ephesians 5:25

Philistinism — The Thought Behind the Attack

That father-in-law's statement is worth sitting with: I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her. The Philistines were the enemies of Israel, and their thoughts about relationships were Philistine thoughts. But notice what the thought is: it is an accusation against the love of the one who had gone away. He went away, therefore he hated her. He came back, but surely the relationship is ended.

This thought has an application to Christ and the assembly that is not accidental. The Lord Jesus went back to heaven. He said He would come again. He has not yet returned. And the Philistine thought — dressed in various forms, sometimes inside Christians' own hearts — is: He must not love her as He once did. He said He would come, but here we are, and He has not. That thought, wherever it surfaces, is Philistinism. It is the voice of the enemy of Christ and of His people, and the Scripture here unmasks it by putting it in the mouth of a Philistine father who thought the marriage bond was broken by absence.

The doctrine that departure breaks the marriage tie is of the same character. Samson's wife was repeatedly called Samson's wife even after she had been given to his companion, even after Samson had been away for a while, even after the father said the words he said. God did not recognize that bond as broken. And Christ's love for His assembly has not grown cold in His absence. He went away and He is coming back. That is not a sign of hatred but of certain promise.

The Mind of Christ — Obedience and Dependence

Philippians 2:5 brings the practical word: let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. The mind of Christ, as shown in Philippians 2, is characterized by

going down — taking the form of a servant, being found in fashion as a man, humbling Himself, becoming obedient unto death. Luke 9:51–55 gives an example from the disciples' failure. When the Samaritans refused to receive the Lord, James and John asked if they should call down fire from heaven. Their thought about the Lord's kingdom dignity was right; their application was entirely wrong. He said: ye know not what spirit ye are of. The Son of Man has not come to destroy men's lives but to save them. That was His mind — patient grace, not judgment. The tares parable in Matthew 13 makes the same point: when the servants wanted to pull up the tares, the master said, no, let both grow until the harvest.

Daniel gives a positive illustration. Three times in chapters 9 and 10 the angel calls him a man greatly beloved. What characterized Daniel? No aggressive activity that we read of, no great projects or campaigns. He stood — he stood against eating the king's meat, he stood against the decree that forbade prayer. But he was a man of prayer, a man of obedience, and a man of dependence. These are the marks of the mind of Christ. We may never have anything said about us after we are gone. But if by His grace we are given to walk in obedience and dependence, that is what the Lord values. Three times over: a man greatly beloved.