

Take-Home 6. This Is a Great Mystery

From the Beginning

What We Found

Verse 21 governs the passage: be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. In the earliest Greek manuscripts verse 22 has no verb of its own and has to borrow it from verse 21.

Wives receive about three verses. Husbands receive about nine, and the content is self surrender: love as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, make her holy, nourish and cherish her.

The Christian household codes address wives, children, and slaves directly, as people with consciences, which is notable against many contemporary household codes.

The Greek word behind head is genuinely disputed. Many Catholic interpreters take the model St. Paul chooses as decisive: Christ's headship is defined by the cross, so headship here requires sacrificial self gift rather than domination.

Genesis 3:16 describes the man ruling over the woman among the consequences of the fall. Many Catholic readers see Ephesians 5:25 as answering that by redirecting husbands toward Christlike self gift.

Nothing in this passage obliges anyone to submit to sin, abuse, coercion, or danger, and the Church has never taught that it does.

St. Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 and then refers it to Christ and the Church. The Church reads marriage as the sign and the union of Christ and his Church as what it points at (CCC 1616-1617).

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON WHAT A HUSBAND IS FOR

In his homily on this passage, St. John Chrysostom told husbands that the love they owe their wives is measured by Christ's love for the Church, which means it is measured by the cross. He taught in substance that a husband should be willing to be cut into a thousand pieces for her, and that a man who rules his wife by fear has failed at the only thing he was asked to do.

He also insisted that the reverence asked of a wife in verse 33 is not the fear of a slave, and that a husband who produces that kind of fear has misread the passage entirely.

Summary of his teaching in Homily 20 on Ephesians.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN PAUL II ON MUTUAL SUBJECTION

St. John Paul II taught that verse 21 governs the whole passage, and that the subjection asked of a wife is one side of a mutual subjection asked of both spouses out of reverence for Christ. He saw no contradiction between the general exhortation and the particular one, because the particular one is a case of the general.

He also argued that this passage introduces something genuinely new into the ancient world.

Summary of his teaching in Mulieris Dignitatem, section 24.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: POPE PIUS XI ON ORDER AND LOVE IN A HOUSEHOLD

Writing on Christian marriage, Pope Pius XI taught that the order within a family does not deny the wife her

liberty or her dignity as a person, does not oblige her to obey every request of a husband regardless of its reasonableness, and does not treat her as a minor.

He is a useful voice precisely because he is writing from a tradition-minded position and still draws the line clearly.

Summary of his teaching in the encyclical Casti Connubii.

Live It This Week

- **Husbands to be: do one costly thing this week.** Choose the specific sacrifice you named in the Couple Conversation and do it before the next session. Do not announce it afterward.
- **Read verses 21 to 33 aloud together once, slowly.** One of you reads the wives' verses and the other reads the husbands' verses, out loud, to each other.
- **Correct one misunderstanding.** The next time this passage comes up in conversation, and it will, explain verse 21 and the verse count. You now know something most people do not.
- **Read the Rite of Marriage consent questions before next session** if your parish can give them to you. Session 7 begins the movement toward the vows themselves.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Ask the parish for the consent questions and the vows from the Rite of Marriage, in writing, and read them once before Session 7. Also ask which form of consent your parish uses and whether you may choose between the forms.

Also. Each of you name one decision you have quietly assumed you would control after the wedding, and say it out loud to each other.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Ephesians 5:25

Before next session: Read the consent questions and the vows if your parish can give them to you. Bring them to Session 7.

Catechism: CCC 369-372, 1616-1617, 1642, 1645, 2204-2206.