

Sing, pray, and keep His ways unswerving,
Perform thy duties faithfully,
And trust His Word; though undeserving,
Thou yet shalt find it true for thee.
God never yet forsook in need
The soul that trusted Him indeed.
(LSB 750:7; BWV 197.10)

Maybe that was the hymn stanza you had in mind; maybe it wasn't. But do you see why it is so very fitting and why it would be difficult to choose a better one? That is what husbands and wives need to hear: *Und was ihr tut, das tut getreu*, "And whatever you do, do faithfully" (2nd line). God has given you your duties. They are good for you. He has never forsaken the one who trusts in Him, and so the command to husbands to love and the command to wives to submit are not signs of God's displeasure, but gifts of His favor that He graciously bestows for the sake of Christ. ❀

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AD FONTES
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A LUTHERAN WEDDING

BY REV. ANDREW P. RICHARD

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THERE WAS A GREAT WEDDING IN LEIPZIG, GERMANY, in the mid-1730s. We don't know whose wedding it was, and we wouldn't think anything of it today at all, had not Johann Sebastian Bach composed a cantata for it. A cantata was a piece of concerted music, about 20 minutes long and split into various movements, made up of sung Scripture passages and poetic verses. Almost all of Bach's cantatas end with a hymn stanza.

Think for a moment about which hymn stanza would best conclude a cantata at a wedding. What words should be echoing in the ears of bridegroom and bride as they prepare for married life together? Which would be best?

Hold that thought, and go back over 1,300 years from the time of Bach and over 1,500 miles from Leipzig to the 390s, to Syrian Antioch, where John Chrysostom is preaching a series of sermons on Ephesians. He gets to the great marriage passage in Ephesians 5: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ

also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:22-27).

Knowing that marriage is first and foremost about Christ and the Church, Chrysostom preaches the Gospel beautifully: "'And He gave Himself up for her,' it says, 'in order that He might cleanse and sanctify her.' Ah, so she was unclean! So she had blemishes! So she was deformed! So she was worthless! Whatever sort of wife you take, you will not take such a bride as that one that Christ took, the Church, nor one as far away from you as the Church was from Christ. But for all that He still did not loathe her nor hate her on account of her excessive deformity."

Though himself a celibate, Chrysostom was a good pastor and knew the common plights within marriage. He knew how suspicion and backbiting can wreak havoc on a marriage: "Let no one be believed who criticizes the husband to his wife. And neither let the husband heedlessly believe something against his wife. Nor let the wife get unreasonably worked up about his coming in and going out. Nor, under any circumstances, let the husband show himself deserving of some suspicion." Chrysostom knew the importance of the head of the house directing his wife and children with the Word of God: "Teach the fear of God, and all things will flow as from a fountain, and the house will be filled with myriads of good things."

John Chrysostom knew something else about husbands and wives: he knew that it's all too easy to think of marriage in terms of the question, "What am I getting out of this? What is owed to me?" He was well aware that Jesus' words, "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?" (Mt. 7:3) applied to marriage as much as anything. Husbands easily recognize when their wives don't submit to them, and wives likewise when their husbands are not loving them. But recognizing that my duty toward my wife isn't tied to her diligence in her duty, but is instead tied to the Word of God—that's a Christian art. Here's how Chrysostom put it:

"'What then,' he says, 'if my wife doesn't revere me?' You love; continue to fulfill your own duty. For even if the things due from others do not follow, it is necessary that our duties do follow. Here's the sort of thing I'm saying: 'Submitting yourselves,' he says, 'to one another in the fear of Christ.' What then, if the other does not submit herself? You comply with the law of God. So also it is here. In any case, let the wife, even if she is not loved, nevertheless show reverence, in order that there be nothing lacking with her. Also the husband: should the wife not show reverence, let him love anyway, in order that he lack nothing. For each one has received his own duty."

Do your duty. If you are a husband, love your wife, not because your wife submits to you, but because God has commanded you to do so and because Christ loves His Church. If you are a wife, submit to your husband, not because your husband loves you, but because God has commanded you and because the Church submits to Christ.



Wedding at Cana by Jacob Folkema (1692-1767).

Wife, submit to your husband as to the Lord. That's what God's Word says, and God's Word is never bad for you, but only good. Husband, love your wife as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. That is God's Word to you, and God's Word is always good for you.

Through His Word He gives you pleasant commands that offer the best possible earthly life. Through His Word He speaks the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ. God's Word is good, and therefore the duties that God's Word prescribes for you are good. Do your duty and enjoy a happy marriage.

Jump forward 1,300 years to the wedding in Leipzig. The sermon is finished, the second half of the cantata reaches the final chorale, and the vocalists sing the familiar words: