**“Cart Before Horse?”**

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Isaiah 29:11-19

Ephesians 5:22-33

Mark 7:1-13

13th Sunday after Pentecost

“**’Therefore** a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to **Christ and the church**. **However, let each one of you** love his wife as himself, and **let the wife see that she respects** her husband.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Bridge

A cart is a fairly **inanimate** object; it seldom **moves on its own**. It has **wheels**, though, so (technically) if it was sitting atop a hill and facing downhill, it could begin **rolling** from its own weight. Mostly, however, it must be **powered** by its **connection** to **a horse**. **Most any** horse could get a cart pulled and moving **in some direction**. But a **particular horse directed a proper way** is a cart’s **best option**.

The phrase “**cart before horse**” describes the **last thing as the first thing**. It can describe, even, **not doing the first steps at all** (**forgetting them** and then, maybe, discovering how useless it was to take the last steps before the first). Our familiarity with the Epistle text (this Ephesians, chapter 5, verses 22 through 33) **without its context of the first things before it (5 and a half chapters of first things first)**, there is an example of, maybe, putting the “cart before the horse”.

The **temptation is there**, though. We hear it at weddings and hope that **our spouses have “listened up” to it,** and may, even, be conscience that (in this short reading) the **pattern is set for** **ALL that the world calls decency and civility**. The problem is that **starting there** (in **just that text**) is a “cart before the horse” activity. That’s why God (through Paul) began His **summary** and **explanation** of the ideal plan with the word “**Therefore**”: because everything at the short **ending** of Ephesians must be pulled (and only works really) if it is so-pulled by the “horse” of what got reminded us **before it**. Decency and civility is a proper “love of neighbor” when (and only when) its pulled by one’s “love from and of God”. Jesus was asked what the greatest expectation of humanity is, and “The **first**”, He said, is “to **love the Lord Your God with all your heart, soul, and mind**”. The “second one (in loving your neighbor as yourself)” is, but, **like it”** (in other words **from it and not the other way around**). Your spouse, then your kids, then those you employ, are numbers 1, 2, and 3 in neighbors. But **your marriage or parenting or supervising of anyone won’t ever be Godly without, first, having a loving marriage and childhood and employment with God**. **After that** (and **from it**) marriage and every other personal relationship will be executed “**like that greatest expectation must be**”. “A man, **therefore**, shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh … a **MYSTERY**.”

**Text**

That “**MYSTERY**” is the **summary of the Gospel** **to which we’re to submit**. From **IT**, any love of neighbor (like wife and children and employees and friends) **can extend**. Outside of **IT**, **relating** can (and often is) just “**transactional**” in one way or another. “Transactional relating” is thinking and acting in ways that (consciously or un-consciously) consider “how we’d look by doing it” or “what’s in it for us” if we do. And maturing Christians do quite a bit of that as well, but **God credits efforts as Good** **in Christians … even makes them Good (“horse before cart”)**. And **Christians regret** when we reverse that or forget about the proper horse’s (God’s) lead in all of it.

“Cart before the horse” helps us look at a **“Second Table of the Law” focus ahead (or without) a First Table focus (a solely civil rightness that tries to leap over the “First Table of the Law”**. The “First Table of the Law” houses the **first 3 Commandments: “You shall not have other Gods before The God”, “You shall not take the name of the Lord Your God in vane”, but rather “call upon Him” and “Remember the Sabbath, keeping it (and the Word spoken and living in yourself) Holy and Sacred”**. Ephesians chapters 1 through 5½ are all about that in the **covenanting of God to His people, “husbanding His wife” (who are that for Him)**. Our identity is **as His** (betrothed, married, baptismally-so throughout and continuing to be as, here, He says, “Christ loved the church and **gave Himself up for her**, that He might **sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might BE holy and without blemish**”. He “**loved her, giving Himself up for her”**, and that’s **sacrifice which IS LOVE** … noticing that the church / the wife doesn’t even have that same expectation to **“love” in the same way** … just **receive that “love” from Him …** **in** **submission to that “love”**.

The **giving and “sacrifice” that** **we know of** is the **Gospel of the** **incarnation of the Heavenly Father’s Son, born then also of woman of Mary, and laid into a manger to grow and then be baptized also into us also, receiving, through His baptism, our sins and rebellion and leaving behind (in baptismal waters) Himself in His Sonship of the Father, obedience to Him, submitting to arrest and execution of His flesh bearing our sins, to give His life in ransom for those who He’d make, baptismally, “of splendor”**.

In both the **incarnation** and **baptism**, God’s Son is shown **“leaving His Father and mother behind and grabbing and holding fast to His wife, becoming “one flesh” with His wife, the church**. He says **first before any other of this marriage text**: “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that **it refers to Christ and the church**” …

**Application**

… yet it doesn’t **only** “refer to Christ and the church”. **Secondly** (and here’s where the “**cart” can’t go before the horse**”, **but FOLLOW IT**: “However” (the text continues), “let each one of you **love his wife as himself**, and **let the wife see that she respects her husband**”. ….

I did promise you that this would get **practical** this week, yet didn’t promise that it would get **earthly practical without the gift of the cosmic bigger picture that it only reflects and extends further**. Every act of **relating** and **thinking** upon this earth **reflects** (when reflecting properly) the **relating of God to us and we back to Him**. It **starts there** as Sunday morning **begins** a week (doesn’t end it). We **gain at the beginning** from our God what, then, we can **use through the week** with spouses and children and co-workers and classmates. Anything **outside of that order of things** is “hypocrisy” (“cart before horse” stuff), and that’s the message through Isaiah and Mark accounting Jesus addressing Pharisees with “you honor me with your lips, but your heart is far from Me. In vain do you worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments **of men**” (doing “**Cart Before Horse**” stuff in just actions without God and movement not grounded in and from Him).

We can spend **time too much worried about how to “love our neighbor” when Jesus would have us concern ourselves first with just receiving Him and His “love” in “sacrifice” with all the gifts given from that “sacrifice”**. The **REST** (that Second Table of the Law” in “loving neighbors as ourselves”) flows then, but only **from** our submission to the “First Table of the Law”-gifts and will of God. To **be a good spouse or parent or co-worker and classmate (a good neighbor)**, we need (first) to **“fear, love, and trust in God above all things, to fear and love Him (God) so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks, and fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.”** God **puts things so into perspective and makes them to work**. May it always work **in and through us**, in +Jesus’ name. Amen.