

“Husband Love Your Wife!
Ephesians 5:25-33
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Like me, you probably hate being manipulated so what I am going to ask you to do next will be a little hard for some of you.

I promise I am not going to embarrass you or ask you to say anything or go anywhere; I just want you to stand for less than 30 seconds if you are a husband.

Husbands please stand up.

Now I want all you unmarried men who expect to be married someday to stand with the married men.

It is to you men that I am speaking most directly today.
You all may be seated.

At the **end** of this message I **am** going to ask **some of you** to do something.

But again, I won't embarrass you because you will decide if it applies to you and if you should do something about it.

Now if you are feeling nervous already, hang on, it gets worse.

Here's the question today: Husband, do you love your wife?

- “Oh, no. What a question!”
- “And the worst thing is you ask it right here in front of my wife.”
- “Unless I can figure out how to get out of here I have to sit here thinking not only how would I answer the question but how would my wife answer it.”
- “I feel a guilt-trip coming up.”

Remember, I did say it gets worse.

But the objective isn't to feel guilty the objective is to change.

And here's some good news for us husbands: If we are Christians, the Spirit of God dwells in us and his goal and energy is aimed at changing us.

It is never too late because of the power of the Spirit within us.

Now back to the question: “Husband, do you love your wife?”

We’d like to respond with an impatient, let’s-get-off-the-subject, “Of course I love my wife!”

But tempered by our wives presence, we are more likely to say, “Ye-es, I love my wife, in my own way.”

Let me up the ante: “Do you love your wife as Christ loves the church?”

The question is drawn from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

In the first three chapters of the book Paul writes about how we become Christians – it is wholly by God’s grace.

With chapter 4 he begins to write of the life-style implications of being a Christian – how does one live as a Christian.

Living as a Christian is far different than living as anyone else.

Two and three weeks ago, in chapters 4&5 we read some very pointed, specific instructions about moral conduct and even moral speech.

Last week from Ephesians 5:15-21 Paul set forth two important principles of how to live the Christian life: He said that as a Christian, our perspective changes and we have a new relationship with God.

Ephesians 5:15-21 “Be very careful, then, how you **live--not as unwise but as wise**... Therefore **do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is**. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, **be filled with the Spirit**...”

We didn’t have time last week to address it, but Paul teaches in this text that living in that kind of relationship with the Spirit results in at least four things:

Ephesians 5:18-21 “Instead, **be filled with the Spirit**. **Speak(ing)** to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. **Sing(ing) and mak(ing) music** in your heart to the Lord, **always giving thanks** to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Submit(ing) to one another** out of reverence for Christ.”

For Paul, it is that last result that he wishes to explain and illustrate further – what it means to be submitting to one another.

And so he will give six examples.

He will talk about submission in the husband/wife relationship, in the parent/child relationship and in the employer/employee relationship.

The idea of “submitting” is a hotly debated one in our culture and I will speak more about it two weeks from now.

But for now let it suffice to say the somewhat obvious:

Submitting to one another does not mean submitting in the same ways to one another.

Children do not submit to parents in the same way that parents submit to children. Jesus does not submit to the church in the same way the church is to submit to him.

With that context, please stand as I read the Scripture for today: Ephesians 5:21-33 “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, (submit) to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

We can easily see the outline from which Paul writes:

Ephesians 5:21-33

V 21 Principle: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

V22-32 Application:

V22-24 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.

V25-32 Husbands, love your wives

V33 Summary: “However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

Looking at verses 25-32, it is the second of the applications that I am addressing today and I will come back to the first in two weeks.

So let me ask the question again: Do you love your wife just as Christ loves the church?

The treatment of wives by their husbands 2000 years ago was tragic.

“What information we do have about women and the attitudes toward them paints an absolutely awful picture. For example one writer said that women were the worst plague that Zeus made. Another said the two best days in a woman’s life are when someone marries her and when he carries her dead body to the grave.

In (1st Century) Judaism women were not counted in the quorum needed for a synagogue....One rabbi advised, “Do not talk much with a woman.” Another added, “Not even with one’s wife.” By and large women were viewed as inferior and were given relatively little freedom.... Even in Rome women were in only a slightly better position than their sisters in the East.

In a few places like Sparta and Egypt women were given greater freedom and responsibility. In most places however if they were allowed to live at birth, women were minimally educated, could not be witnesses in a court of law, could not adopt children or make a contract, could not own property or inherit, and were viewed, as both Aristotle and Josephus said, in all respects to be inferior to a man. They’re seen as less intelligent, less moral and the source of sin and continual temptation.” (Snodgrass, 303)

You can easily imagine then that Paul’s words to husbands came as a surprise.

For wives to submit to their husbands was normal.

For husbands to love their wives was irrelevant.

Well we've come a long way since that time haven't we?
Or have we?

For centuries men have had the upper hand in marriage.

Both through physical strength and economic power they have been able to control women.

The kindest term for that kind of arrangement is male chauvinism but the more accurate is misogyny – hatred of women.

Even as women have gained power in some cultures the result in the husband/wife relationship has not gotten much better.

Instead of chauvinism where husbands used and abused their wives, we wound up with competition where husbands and wives use and abuse each other or with compromise.

By saying that I am not suggesting that even in America have we created an equal playing field for wives.

What I am saying is that even if we did create an equal playing field, we would have only changed the problem not solved it.

This is hardly what God has in mind when he speaks of submitting to each other.

God's objective for us is not chauvinism or competition or even compromise.

Christ-following men and women are called into husband/wife relationships modeled after the relationship of Jesus and his church.

And for a husband that is summarized in the statement, "Husband, love your wife just as Christ loves the church."

What Paul does in this passage is describe both **how** a husband is to love his wife and the goal of a husband's love for his wife.

The **"how"** is stated in verses 25 and 28-30.

Ephesians 5:25,28-30 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and **gave himself up for her**... In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives **as their own bodies**. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one

ever hated his own body, but he **feeds and cares for** it, just as Christ does the church--for we are members of **his** body.

The **“goal”** is stated in verses 26&27.

Ephesians 5:26-27 “To make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

Let’s go back to the **“how”** for a couple of minutes.

How does Jesus love his church? How does he love us?

v25 He “gave himself up for” us.

- Romans 5:8 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- Philippians 2:5-8 “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but...(took) the very nature of a servant... And...humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!”

The gods of other religions are hard taskmasters.

They say that if you want a relationship with them, if you want their favor, you have to earn it.

And woe is you if you don’t measure up to their fickle expectations.

But our God comes to us and says if we want a relationship with him we can’t earn it, he has to.

He doesn’t ask us to begin by giving ourselves to him but he begins by giving himself for us.

Too many of us husbands act like the gods of other religions.

If our wives measure up, if they will do what they are supposed to do for us, then we will respond to them.

But woe to them if they don’t measure up to our fickle expectations.

Our response to them is measured out by how much they give to us.

We've got it all wrong. We've got it backwards.

Who is supposed to serve whom in a marriage?

Jesus gave himself up for us.

Every move Jesus made was calculated based on his love for us.

He literally gave his life to meet our need.

Husbands who are we supposed to "give ourselves up for"?

Ourselves? Our jobs? Our children?

Some of us men need to be honest that we are content with our wives as long as they support our agendas or at least don't interfere with them.

We deceive ourselves saying that we give ourselves up for our jobs so that we can provide for our families when the truth is that we have given ourselves up for our jobs because we like the rewards.

Most of us married when we were still young-wet-behind-the-ears-hopefuls; certainly not promises.

Our wives didn't marry us because they were in love with our income or status – we didn't have either.

They married us because they wanted us.

Maybe after losing us to what we truly give ourselves up for, they've settled for what we could provide, but it is not what they wanted.

I'm always troubled by the number of young husbands whose lives are largely unchanged by marriage.

They are still involved nearly as much in the same hobbies, sports, and other interests as before marriage.

They were serving themselves before they married and they are still serving themselves after marriage – only now they expect their wives to serve them as well.

Another issue: A husband's love for his wife, if like Christ's self-sacrificing love, is not based on his wife's attractiveness, attributes or her abilities.

We may wake up some day after being married a while and finally admit to ourselves that our wives are not as attractive, or compliant, or capable as we once thought.

And the tragedy is that based on such things, we might even admit to ourselves we don't feel what we used to feel.

We might even say, "I'm not in love any more."

All of those thoughts only reveal that love for us, all along, was only a response not an action.

We are not commanded to love our wives for what they are or do.

Christ loves us not because of what we are or do and in fact in spite of what we are and do.

I know that a woman is complimented, even flattered, if we say we love her because of her intelligence, appearance, her personality, or her other virtues – **and to be sure those are great benefits to us** – but if our love is based on those things our love will ebb and flow as our perception of those qualities ebbs and flows.

Many of you have read this statement by the past president of Columbia Bible College, Dr. Robertson McQuilkin:

"My dear wife, Muriel, has been in failing mental health for about eight years. So far I have been able to carry both her ever-growing needs and my leadership responsibilities at Columbia. But recently it has become apparent that Muriel is contented most of the time she is with me and almost none of the time I am away from her. It is not just discontent. She is filled with fear – even terror – that she has lost me and always goes in search of me when I leave home. Then she may be full of anger when she cannot get to me. So it is clear to me that she needs me now, full-time. Perhaps it will help you to understand if I share with you what I shared at the time of the announcement of my resignation in chapel. The decision was made in a way 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel in sickness and in health...till death do us part. So, as I told the students and faculty, as a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years; if I cared for her for the next 40 years I would not be out of debt. Duty, however, can be grim and stoic. But there is more; I love Muriel. She is a delight to me – her childlike dependence and confidence in me,

her warm love, occasional flashes of wit I used to relish so, her happy spirit and tough resilience in the face of her continual distressing frustration. I do not have to care for her; I get to! It is a high honor to care for so wonderful a person.” (In Huges, *Disciplines of Godly Man*, 33)

Our own Larry Graber has demonstrated the same kind of love over these past seven years.

But I notice that McQuilkin speaks to two different aspects of his love. One is choice and the other is response.

- He chooses to love her out commitment and duty.
- And he responds to her loveliness.

Christ’s love for us is the former.

Jesus’ love for us is not in response to our loveliness.

He loves us right through our rebellion, our indifference, or our disregard.

He doesn’t withhold his love or condition his love.

This is a very different way of looking at love but it is vitally important.

That may not sound very romantic but romantic feelings are not the basis of a marriage and they won’t hold it together.

Oh, I hope you enjoy the feelings of romance in your marriage but I much more want you to be able to understand that those feelings are not the basis of your marriage –

The basis of a Christian marriage is a choice – the choice of self-sacrificing service.

There’s a second description of HOW husbands are to love their wives:

Ephesians 5:25, 28-30 “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives **as their own bodies**. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he **feeds and cares for** it, just as Christ does the church--for we are members of his body.

Paul speaks very deliberately and precisely to the point that **we become part of Christ** upon conversion.

We are brought into union with him.

The connection, the union, is so strong that it is spoken of as becoming one with him, of being in him, of him being in us.

We are now so inseparably connected that we are described as his body.

Ephesians 5:30 "for we are members of his body.

It is that kind of connection, that oneness, that union of two becoming one that is pointed out in verse 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and **the two will become one flesh.**"

God designed marriage so that a mystical union takes place.

Paul's argument is not just that we husbands are to treat our wives **like** we would treat our own bodies but that we would treat our wives **as** our own bodies.

A husband and wife have become so much one new entity that how a husband treats his wife is in fact how he is treating himself.

We know how careful we are about taking care of ourselves.

Nearly three months ago I apparently cracked a rib while sliding head first into a lake off a water slide.

- For those three months I have protected that side of my body as if my life depended on it.
- For over two months I couldn't lie on that side and couldn't bend in certain ways.
- I moved in and out of the car in a very deliberate way.
- When my son would jump on me I would involuntarily move to protect that side.

Paul is saying that as carefully as we would protect, care for and feed our own bodies so we protect, care for and feed our wives – because we (a husband and wife) are in fact one new entity.

I know that I haven't given you a lot of illustrations for how to do this but I wanted to **spend my time giving you a whole new orientation** from which to think about your relationship with your wife.

Husband love your wife just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, loving her as his own body, caring and feeding her.

With the time I have left I want to talk about the goal of a husband's love.

Ephesians 5:25-27 “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her **to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church**, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

I am not going to press for a one to one correspondence between this description of Christ's goal for the church and what ought to be our goal for our wives BUT neither can we say Paul just got carried away describing the Christ/church relationship and say it has nothing to do with describing a husband's relationship with his wife.

Paul is describing how a Christian husband's love for his wife is modeled on Christ's love for the church.

It is not only self-sacrificing but it's goal is her spiritual welfare.

Jesus gave himself up for us not as a martyr but to produce a specific result.

He lived and died to bring us to glory.

He intercedes for us now to protect us to that end.

He has given his Spirit and spiritual gifts to help us grow.

The Scriptures make it clear that Jesus didn't just do his thing on earth and then quit once he got back to heaven.

Neither is he preoccupied with other things – he is preoccupied, absorbed, with us and our spiritual welfare.

And his intention is to so work in us that over time by his active grace we will be changed.

2 Corinthians 3:18 “And we... are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory...”

To what end?

Paul says God's purpose is v27 **"To present her (the church – us) to himself as a radiant church, without stain, wrinkle or blemish, but holy and blameless."**

Here he is looking forward to that day when Jesus comes again and our salvation is completed – when we are finally and fully transformed, recreated in the image of God.

Without "stain, wrinkle, or blemish" is clearly language of physical beauty (drawn most likely from Ezekiel 16).

But the beauty the Lord is describing is not physical but moral and spiritual as indicated by "holy and blameless" – you will perfectly reflect the character of God – the fruit of the Spirit will be natural.

And how does Jesus do that?

Here he specifically mentions, "Cleansing her by the washing with water through the word."

It is the gospel, the Word of God that the Spirit of God uses to transform us.

But elsewhere the Scripture teaches that Jesus and the Spirit are constantly praying for us as well.

Hebrews 7:25 "Because Jesus lives forever... he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

Romans 8:26 "The Spirit himself intercedes for us..."

Husbands, for what purpose are we to love our wives as Christ loved the church by giving ourselves up for it?

To be God's primary human instrument in bringing her to maturity in the faith.

John Piper has written, "God made man to be a sharer. God created us not to be cul-de-sacs of his bounty but conduits. No man is complete unless he is conducting grace (like electricity) between God and another person." (Piper, *Brothers We are Not Professionals*, 247)

Jesus finds his joy and his glory in making us what he created us to be.

Husbands find their greatest joy and glory not in selfish living but in enabling their wives to be all God created them to be.
That is servant-leadership.

According to God's word, the relationship of a husband and wife is stronger than that between a parent and a child.

Nowhere in the Bible is the parent/child relationship described as "one flesh" or "one body".

Men, God will hold us responsible for the spiritual welfare of our wives more than for anyone else.

Be responsible to take initiative spiritually – get your family to church, encourage her spiritual growth by encouraging her participation in ministry and study of God's word.

Better yet, read and respond to God's word together in personal time or in a small group.

Encourage and help her develop her God-given abilities.

Pray for her.

Pray with her.

Now if your wife won't pray with you or doesn't want to read the Bible with you it may well be because she doesn't yet believe you have changed your whole orientation toward her.

If she still perceives that your attitude is that she exists to serve you – she won't be very interested in you using the Bible to bludgeon her into greater service.

Does your wife believe that you love her?

Not just that you find her attractive or useful but that you love her?

Does she have reason to believe that you love her just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... and that you love her as your own body. That your desire is to feed and care for her, just as Christ does the church...

The then Prime Minister of Great Britain, Sir Winston Churchill was asked, "If you could not be who you are, who would you like to be?"

He was asked the question at a formal dinner attended by many important people.

Churchill was sitting next to his wife Clemmie, as he called her, and he took her hand as he rose and responded, "If I could not be who I am, I would most like to be... Lady Churchill's second husband." (James Humes, Churchill, Speaker of the Century, 1980, 291)

If you said that of your relationship with your wife, would she believe you?

Are there some of us husbands who need to change the way we think about marriage?

What would it look like if you loved your wife just as Christ loved the church and **gave himself** for her?

Are there some of us husbands who need to change the way we think about the purpose of our marriages?

What would it look like if your purpose in marriage were your wife's spiritual welfare?

Some of us have abdicated spiritual responsibility for our wives and families for too long.

Husbands, will we begin praying for and even with our wives?
Husbands, will we begin reading God's word and discussing it with our wives?

Maybe you have a wife who has paid more attention to her spiritual growth than you have and you'll be embarrassed by what you don't know.

I'm sympathetic to the problem but I'm not sympathetic to your solution of doing nothing, which only makes the matter worse.

Christian husbands, it's time to act.

And because I know how capable we are putting this off, I want you to stand with me if you are willing, by God's grace, to take responsibility for the spiritual welfare of your wife.