

"The Husband-Wife Relationship" Ephesians 5:25-33

Introduction

- Just this week, the AP released the bizarre story of a man from Lacrosse who said he, and I quote, “threw a live electrical wire into his wife's bath hoping a near-death experience would save their marriage.”¹ The wife tells another story. She “testified Tuesday her husband drew her bath after they spent the day taking a walk and a long motorcycle ride. While she took her bath, her husband came into the bathroom and dropped the cord into the bath. She jumped out of the bath, but her husband tried to push her back in the tub.” Sick isn't it.
- This morning, we continue our examination of the husband-wife relationship, specifically looking at the husband's responsibility in maintaining the marriage covenant. I believe one reason the divine institution of marriage is crumbling is because men, even Christian men, simply don't love their wives.
- In a recent *Books and Culture* article entitled “*When Marriage Brings Suffering*” the author David Gushee lists **eight** phases that marriages transition in and out of throughout the life of a marriage. 1) *Ecstatic union* 2) *Intimate partnership* 3) *Cordial friendship* 4) *Peaceful coexistence* 5) *Terse silence* 6) *Active hostility* 7) *Full-scale belligerence* and 8) *Irreconcilable brokenness*.² Husbands, it's your responsibility to keep your marriage from sliding down the scale from ecstatic union to irreconcilable brokenness. How? By sacrificially loving your wife. Generally speaking, most husbands know that dropping live wires into their wives' bathtubs is in no way loving. That's detestable behavior. But what does it mean to sacrificially love your spouse? Men, what are we called to? What does God expect of us as husbands?

Transition

Last week I asked two questions, “What is God's design for marriage? What is a Christian marriage?” This morning, we'll round out our understanding of God's intention for marriage by looking at the husband's responsibility. One of God's great purposes for his church, for this church, is that we build strong Christian marriages. And it all begins with husbands. Allow me to remind you of the truth governing this discussion of marriage.

Proposition

- **A truly Christian marriage will mirror the relationship between Christ and his church.**³

Transition

As we saw last week, the church and marriage parallel each other. One is the model for the other. And it's not what we might think, that marriage is the model for the church's relationship

¹ AP Wire, Wednesday, October 27, 2004.

² David Gushee, “When Marriage Brings Suffering”, *Books and Culture*, September/October 2004, p. 40.

³ Wording taken from Peter O'Brien's commentary on Ephesians, p. 408.

to Christ. Does Christ learn how to love the church by watching human husbands love their wives? I certainly hope not. It's the other way around. Christ's relationship to the church is the model for the husband-wife relationship. And so if we want to understand how to live in the context of a husband-wife marriage relationship we must look at Christ and the church. Open your bibles to Ephesians 5:22-33.

Organizational Sentence

- **Ephesians 5:22-33 explains in two sections, first to wives then to husbands, the ways in which marriage must reflect the relationship between Christ and his church.**

Background/Setting

- Last week we looked at the first section, verses 22-24, and learned that the wife's responsibility is to submit to her husband's leadership as the church submits to Christ's leadership. Again, wives—is this hard to do? You bet. Has this pattern for marriage been perverted and distorted by sinful husbands. You bet. But does that change the fact that it's a noble calling? No. How do I know? Is the church's calling noble?—there is hardly a thing more important to God.
- In spite of what you might think about Paul because of verses 22-24, he was not a misogynist, a woman hater. Paul, I believe, was greatly concerned about the welfare and status of women. Life for women in the ancient world was atrocious. It was much better if you were a mistress, or even a slave. Slaves were employed, wives were property. The only reason a man slept with his wife was for children. Mistresses were for everything else. And so when Paul commands in verses 25-33 that husbands are to love their wives, he's making a revolutionary statement. The value of a wife is placed at a premium because *she is a wife*. And sacrificially loving your wife is an extremely high calling because it restores to the marriage relationship the view of women that God has.

Transition

Again, I really believe the key to understanding the husband's responsibility in marriage—and the wife's as well—is Christ's relationship to the church. In the second section, we are going to learn that the **husband's responsibility is to sacrificially love his wife as Christ loves the church**. That's the first and only point on your outline today, or if you're counting from last week, the second in this two part miniseries on marriage. Let me restate what I hope you take away from this morning's message. The way a husband mirrors Christ's relationship to the church in his marriage is by sacrificially loving his wife.

Main Points

I. The husband's responsibility is to sacrificially love his wife as Christ loves the church (5:25-33)

A) Validation

- i) There are few things more unlovely than an unloved wife. And there are few things more beautiful than a wife blossoming because of the radiant self-sacrificing love of

her husband. Is sacrificial love difficult to understand and live out? Yes. Only by living a Spirit influenced life is it possible. Is it a bad thing? Definitely not. How do I know? Because Christ's sacrificial love on behalf of the church is a wonderful thing. There are great benefits and blessings because of Christ's sacrificial love. Right? In the same way, it's incredibly good; there are great benefits and blessings when a husband loves his wife sacrificially. The problem is that we don't properly understand Christ's sacrificial role as it relates to the church and so husbands have a shallow understanding of what it means to love their wives. **A truly Christian marriage will mirror the relationship between Christ and his church. The way a husband mirrors Christ's relationship to the church in his marriage is by sacrificially loving his wife.**

B) Explanation

i) The British critic **Cyril Connolly** once said, "The true index of a man's character is the health of his wife."⁴ How you treat your wife reveals your true character. Wives are incredibly valuable to God. And if a husband doesn't value what God values, his character hasn't been fully formed. Look at the command given to husbands in **verse 25**. And, by the way, men, husbands are nowhere commanded in these verses to "exercise your headship."⁵ No. Instead, Paul says, *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*. What God calls the husband to is the complete and total-self sacrifice for the benefit of his wife. Let me say that again. What God calls the husband to is the complete and total self-sacrifice for the benefit of his wife. The model being Christ's sacrifice for the church. Christ took the initiative in handing himself over to death. He went to the cross willingly. In the same way, all areas of a husband's life, as he relates to his wife, must be characterized by this willing, self-giving, sacrificial love.

(a) That brings up a question. What exactly did Christ sacrifice for the church? If you were to answer his life, you'd only be partially correct. Husbands certainly are called to sacrifice their physical lives, if need be, for their wives, just as Christ died on the cross for the church. But Christ also gave up something else. Flip to Philippians 2:6. Listen. *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!* Paul says that Christ, before he gave up his life, sacrificed his glory as part of the godhead; *he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped*. Or as the NLT puts it, *though he was God he didn't demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing*. Christ humbly gave up the rights and privileges he deserved as God. What that means is that husbands, even though you sit in a position of authority in the husband-wife relationship, you should never demand or cling to your rights that come with that position of authority. The moment you pull out the trump card and flaunt your headship, is

⁴ Cyril Connolly (1903–74), British critic. *The Unquiet Grave*, pt. 2 (1944; rev. 1951). *The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations* is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993, 1995 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

⁵ O'Brien, p. 419.

the moment you've crossed the line from sacrificial love to control. And that is unacceptable in the husband-wife relationship.

ii) Now what makes this passage even more interesting is that Paul goes on to explain the purposes of Christ's love for his church. In other words, sacrifice is not done willy-nilly. It's done with a purpose, for a purpose, to achieve an end. Just as Christ's sacrifice gains something for the church, the husband's sacrifice for his wife is for her benefit, for her good, **and it must be purposeful**. Listen to [verses 26-7](#); *in order to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

(a) Let's quickly break down these clauses. Christ sacrificed himself in order to sanctify the church; to make her holy. In the Old Testament both people and things could either be holy or common. Common things that became holy had to be sanctified. In the same way, Christ's sacrifice on behalf of the church is what transforms it from common to holy, sanctified, set apart for service to God. And so in this context, when a husband loves his wife sacrificially, he does so with the intent that his loving sacrifice will make his wife more holy, godlier. In the words of French novelist [Georges Bataille](#), "Sacrifice is nothing other than the production of *sacred* things."⁶ Men, did you realize that your wife will become godlier when you sacrificially love her? On the other side of it, wives, your husband's sacrificial love is not simply for romance and quality time but in order that your spiritual life with God might flourish.

(b) Paul also says that one of the purposes of Christ's sacrifice is to cleanse the church. This cleansing is concurrent with making it holy.⁷ What's pictured here with the washing and cleansing is the bath a bride would take before her betrothal. Christ's sacrificial love is like that bath; its purpose is to beautify. In the same way, a husband's sacrificial love should be like a trip to the spa-spiritually speaking.

(c) Christ's sacrificial love also makes the church radiant, without wrinkle, without blemish. In the words of [Peter O'Brien](#), "Not even the smallest spot or pucker that spoils the smoothness of the skin will mar the unsurpassed beauty of Christ's bride when he presents her to himself. Hers will be a splendor that is exquisite, unsurpassed, matchless."⁸ That's what sacrificial love does. In the same way, a husband's sacrificial love should beautify his wife on the inside.

(1) Guys, question for you. How attractive is your wife's character? The relative beauty or ugliness of your wife's character is dependent upon your willing, loving sacrifice on her behalf. In other words, if your wife is the kind of person people don't want to be around, it's partly your fault.

(d) So let's summarize the husband's responsibility. "In light of Christ's complete giving of himself to make the church holy and cleanse her, husbands should be

⁶ Georges Bataille (1897–1962), French novelist, critic. "The Notion of Expenditure," in *La Critique Sociale* (Paris, Jan. 1933; repr. in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927–1939*, ed. by Allan Stoekl, 1985).⁶*The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations* is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993, 1995 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

⁷ O'Brien, p. 422.

⁸ O'Brien, p. 425.

utterly committed to the total well-being, especially the spiritual welfare, of their wives.”⁹ Honestly, men, how many of us love our wives in this purposeful, directed kind of way? Taking the trash out, cleaning the dishes, doing the laundry is good but those things are incomplete expressions of love. Sacrificing your time and energy, doing those things so that our wife can have time to pray and read God’s word and grow in her relationship with God; that’s sacrificial love perfected! That’s what Christ did for the church! Husbands ask yourself, what is keeping your wife from spending time with and growing in her relationship with God. Find out what those things are and lovingly sacrifice yourself, do whatever it takes, and give whatever time necessary in order to eliminate those obstacles. That’s what it means to truly love your wife. What then are the implications for headship? The biblical idea of headship DOES NOT CRUSH, IT SACRIFICES. As **John Stott** says, “a husband should never use his headship to crush or stifle his wife, or frustrate her from being herself. His love for her will lead him to an exactly opposite path. He will give himself for her, in order that she may develop her full potential under God and so become more completely herself.”¹⁰ “If headship means power in any sense then it is power to care not to crush, power to serve not to dominate, power to facilitate self-fulfillment, not to frustrate or destroy it.”¹¹ That is God’s plan for marriage.

- iii) Now Paul says something really interesting in **verses 28-29**. If a husband can’t or doesn’t love his wife, it’s not because his wife is unlovable, it’s because the husband doesn’t love himself. Listen. *In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* What Paul seems to be saying is that husbands are obligated to love their wives as they love themselves. Let me say it another way. If you don’t love your wife-the problem is not with your wife it’s with you. Your imperfect love for your wife is keeping her from becoming the person God has designed her to be under your care. Moreover, if you don’t love your wife what that really shows is your displeasure with yourself. It’s like hating your own body and people don’t naturally hate themselves. They care and cherish and love their own bodies. *After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church.* Husbands, do you cherish and care for your wives in this way, in the way you care for your own body? That’s what you are called to do.
- iv) And the reason we are called to do this is based upon the theological principle of two becoming one. Again the model is Christ and the church. **A truly Christian marriage must mirror Christ’s relationship to the church.** Paul says in **verse 30**, *For we are members of his body.* His way of saying that Christ and the church have become one. Why are husbands to love their wives as themselves? Because husbands are actually one flesh with their wives; just like the church is one flesh with Christ. The evidence for this? The creation narrative. **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.”* Because two people are actually one, the husband must love his wife as himself.

⁹ O’Brien, p. 424.

¹⁰ Stott, p. 229.

¹¹ Stott, p. 232.

(a) Now let me briefly comment on verse 31 because Paul's quotation of Genesis 2:24 in verse 31 is fundamentally the most important statement in the NT concerning marriage. Why? Because it grounds the husband-wife relationship in creation. To argue that headship or submission is cultural and not applicable for today simply doesn't fly because the reasons for the commands are not cultural but creational. This is how God intended marriage to operate. And what's even more interesting is Paul's explanation of verse 31 in [verse 32](#). *This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church.* You'd expect Paul to say, *this one flesh thing I'm talking about is a profound mystery--this union between man and wife.* Instead he says, "the two have become one flesh--and just so you aren't confused, I'm talking about Christ and the church." Please don't miss this. Paul seems to be saying that the reason husbands and wives live out this pattern of submission and headship and sacrificial love is because the institution of marriage is patterned after Christ and the church. From the very beginning, God instituted marriage to be a picture that foreshadowed the relationship between Christ and his redeemed people. What this means is that when we tinker with the husband and wife relationship, when we try to distort this pattern and live out marriage differently, or when we downright rebel against this model we are actually saying that Christ's relationship to the church, the way Christ treats the church, the way the church responds to Christ is is imperfect, not good enough, is flawed and needs to be changed. The whole reason husbands and wives are to live as they do is because that's how Christ treats the church. If you want a Christian marriage, it can't be any other way. And so Paul sums everything up in [verse 33](#) with the reminder. *However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

(1) That's why the movement to redefine marriage to include homosexual relationships is so troubling. At the heart of it is a slanderous, blasphemous attitude toward Christ and his church. If marriage is redefined by our culture, all is not lost. But the work Christians will have to do to reach our culture will have increased exponentially because the primary picture of Christ's relationship to his church, marriage between a man and a woman, will have lost its meaning. Certainly a lot is at stake with this issue. But for right now, I think God would be pleased if Christian husbands would just love their wives as themselves.

C) Illustration

i) As I was doing research, I came across another pastor who found a 1930s edition of the *Chicago Herald Examiner* and an article about a husband and a wife. "Man Spites His Wife by Staying Blindfolded in Bed Seven Years." It reads as follows: The strange story of Harry Havens of Indiana, who went to bed—and stayed there—for seven years with a blindfold over his eyes because he was peeved at his wife, was revealed here today when he decided to get out of bed. Havens was the kind of husband who liked to help around the house—hang pictures, wipe the dishes, and such. His wife scolded him for the way he was performing one of these tasks, and he resented it. He is reported to have said: 'All right. If that's the way you feel, I'm going to bed. I'm going to stay there the rest of my life. And I don't want to see you or anyone else

again.’ His last remark explains the blindfold. He got up, he explained, when the bed started to feel uncomfortable after seven years.’¹²

D) Application

- i) Some of you may be refusing to love your wife because of what she’s done or said to you in the past. You’ve climbed into your bed and insulated yourself from your calling. Get out of bed. Men, please realize the call to love our wives sacrificially is to be rendered gladly, irrespective of whether our wives submits or not, irrespective of the ways they treats us. There is no suggestion that husbands are to love only if their wives are submissive.¹³ So what do you do if as a husband you do not want to or have not loved your wife in the ways we have talked about this morning? Again, I would ask you if you have a problem with the way Christ treats the church. If not, then in the quietness of your heart before God, ask him show you ways in which you can sacrificially love your wife?
- ii) For those of you who are still trying to get a handle on what marriage looks like as I’ve described it, here are some helpful suggestions for men regarding our responsibilities.¹⁴ 1) *Considerate leadership does not mean harsh or domineering use of authority.* Husbands are called to as it says in Colossians 3:19 *to love your wives and do not be harsh with them.* 2) *Considerate leadership does not imply equal sharing of leadership in the family.* Men are called to lead their families. 3) *Considerate leadership does not imply lesser importance for a wife.* In no way, has scripture, either this week or last, devalued the worth of a woman. Just the opposite, it has elevated a woman’s worth. 4) *Considerate leadership does not mean always giving in to a wife’s wishes.* 5) *Considerate leadership is not optional for husbands.*

Conclusion

- God doesn’t make mistakes. His design of marriage, although difficult to live out, is for our good. As we close this morning. I want you to, if you are married, take the hand of your spouse, close your eyes and bow your heads. I want you to pray for your spouse. They are the most important person in your life. Pray silently for them for them and then in the car on the way home I want you to talk about what you prayed for and tell your spouse how special they are to you. Let’s pray.

¹² Citation: Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky; source: *Chicago Herald Examiner* (11-17-1930).

¹³ O’Brien, p. 418.

¹⁴ Grudem and Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, p. 205-7.