

## Just as Christ loved the Church Eph. 5:22-27

Read Eph. 5:22-30 - 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.

In this section of Paul's letter he addressed married couples. Conflict in marriage is as old as marriage itself. Like our world today, the background these Ephesian believers were saved from supported selfishness and offered nothing to help couples get along. So God spoke through Paul to supply the truth these believers lacked.

According to God's design, the duty of wives is to respect and submit to the leadership God has entrusted to their husbands. The responsibility of husbands is to love their wives. As we said last time, all of this is to happen in the context of a **one flesh** relationship that is modeled after the unity that exists in the Triune God. A husband and his wife glorify God as they live together in harmony. The example for a wife's submission is the way the church submits to Christ. And the example for husband's love is the way Christ's loves His bride, the Church.

This AM, I want to set aside the marriage instructions to focus entirely on the example...the love of Christ. As we savor the wonder of Christ's love, may our hearts be challenged to love as He does.

The power of a good example works like that. When I look at my neighbor's lawn I see how much better his is than mine. I hear my grass begging for love. My good neighbor is retired with lots of time and money to invest, so I'll never keep up with him! (That's my excuse and I'm stickin to it.) But as I look at how lush and full his lawn is, I'm motivated to do something to improve my weed patch. That's the effect of a good example. If you want to love the Lord more, study His love letter and choose friends who love Him. A bumper sticker in our old church bus read, *"If you want to soar like eagles, don't run with turkeys."* But if you're serious about increasing your love for your mate, the best way to do it is to meditate on the example of Christ's love for us. Jesus said, **"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me..."**

Paul raised the bar to its highest level when he urged husbands to love our wives the same way Christ loves the Church. In fact the bar is so high we can't clear it in our own strength. The love described here is God's kind of love...a love that can only be

activated in us by the power of His Holy Spirit. That's why **v.18** and the command to be **filled with the Spirit** precede the relational commands. To love Christ's way requires the enablement of His Spirit.

So let's consider Christ's love for us. His love is declared and described here and throughout the NT.

His love is...

### **1. A perfect love - v.25 - Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...**

In the original language, the verb translated **love** is the Greek word **agape**. In the first century, God's love was so radical, unfamiliar and perfect a new Greek word had to be coined to express it.

Notice this love of Christ prompted Him **to give himself up for** the church...for all who embrace Jesus as Savior and Lord. That's the essence of what **agape love** is...it's giving, not taking. It's a love that does for others. It's selfless and sacrificial and active. And agape is a love that isn't dependent on loving feelings.

This love is a choice that puts the needs of the ones loved ahead of personal interests and comfort. And here's the thing that makes this self-sacrificing love so unique...it proceeds from the heart of the one who loves irrespective of the worthiness of the one loved. If you think God loves you because you're so loveable, you need to get over it. You're deluded! You're a stinker but Christ loves you anyway. Our behavior is offensive to the God who is holy but He loves us with an everlasting love.

A pair of **3:16** NT verses declare what love is and how very much God loves each one of us. **Jn. 3:16 - "For God so loved the world (that's all of us) that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. / I Jn. 3:16 - This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.**

So in the first place, the love of Christ is perfect. It's the highest form of love. It's a love that overlooked our sinfulness to come to us and do what was necessary to save us. The second thing we can say about Christ's love is that it was and is...

### **2. A planned love - v. 25 - and gave Himself up for her...**

I'm sure many of us have grabbed a gift at the last minute when we remembered it was Mother's Day, her birthday, or your wedding anniversary. Shame on us! The Bible explains that Christ's death on the cross was no miscalculation or after-thought. Jesus is declared to be **the lamb slain from the creation of the earth. (Rev. 13:8)** In other words, at the time of Creation, God already knew Adam and Eve would disobey Him. He knew their sin would go viral and would bring sin, death, and misery into the world...a condition humanity could never resolve on our own. So before creation, God had already conceived a plan to save and cleanse people from sin. The plan centered

on Jesus, the sinless Son of God, whom God would send to earth at a point later in history. Unlike the many lambs offered again and again on Jewish altars, Jesus was offered one time for every sin, for all humanity, and for all time. **Heb. 10:10** says that **we** (who believe) **have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

But the point is this...God planned to love us. Like a guy who dreams up something crazy extravagant to do for the woman he loves, God conceived the redemption plan. Then throughout the twists and turns of time, God stayed by His plan. Though Satan tried to corrupt and derail the plan, God triumphed and maintained His course. A verse often referred to at Christmas is **Gal. 4:4, 5 - But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.** When God's appointed moment in history arrived, He sent Jesus into the world to suffer and die on cross. The perfect Son of God was sacrificed in the place of a world of lost and dying sinners...the righteous One died for the unrighteous many. This is the Gospel...the Good News. **II Cor. 5:21 - God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.**

And this out-pouring of God's love was personal. God knows us by name not as a mass! Not only did God plan redemption from the time of creation, but **Eph. 1:4** says, **...He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.** Now here's my advice, don't mess with this verse...just accept it. It says, God chose you. Just smile and be thankful.

So not only did God's plan pre-date creation, but His sovereign choice of every person who would believe and be saved also predates creation. Do you get that? God planned to love you and save you before He created the universe! And one thing about God that makes Him so unlike us is this...He never changes. **Rom. 11:29** says **God's gifts and His call are irrevocable. Irrevocable** means *impossible to revoke undo or change*. God's word says He loved us and chose us before we even existed.

So let's put this all together. The greatest gift of God's love was planned before creation. God stayed by His plan from creation to the arrival of Jesus and He's still working that plan today. His plan included each person who today believes and is saved. According to **v.29** Christ's love for us is expressed today by the way **feeds and cares for...the church.**

And because the outcome of God's plan has been pre-determined and pre-announced, we can be sure God's love for us will never change. The end of God's love story has already been written. Because believers are so secure in this planned love of Christ, Paul wrote in **Rom. 8:38, 39 - For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

But this leads to the third point about Christ's love. His love is...

**3. A purposeful love** - to complete the sentence, let me read **vs.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.**

The intention of Christ's loving sacrifice was not to make us fat and happy. Christ loved us and went to the cross to make us holy. You've often heard me quote Max Lucado who says, "*God loves you just as you are but He loves you too much to leave you that way.*" Holiness is necessary for fellowship with God and entrance into heaven. The Bible declares that God is holy. To be holy means *to be distinct, separate, a cut above, and in a class by itself. The opposite of being holy is to be ordinary or profane.* So Christ gave Himself to make us holy like He is.

**v.26** explains how Christ makes us holy. It happens through **the washing of the water of the Word.** Now remember, Jesus is the Incarnate Word of God. Throughout the Bible, places where God is uniquely present are called, holy places. The ground where God appeared to Moses was holy because God was there. Jerusalem, the Tabernacle, the Temple and the Church are called holy because God was or is uniquely present in those places. So the presence of Christ in our lives makes us holy. We are holy because God in the person of the Spirit of Christ resides in all who believe. We call this positional holiness. We are holy because Christ lives in us.

But **v.26** seems to emphasize the practical side...the ongoing process which cleanses and makes us holy in thought, word, motive, and deed here and now. And notice how Christ accomplishes this. He cleanses us by the washing with water through the word. In **Jn. 17:17** Jesus prayed, **Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.** The word **sanctify** derives from the same root word and means *to make holy.* Jesus said the truth will make you free, but He also said the truth will make you holy. This holy Word of God is designed to wash over us and cleanse us. But like Peter, who didn't want Jesus to wash his feet, we need to submit to the washing of the water of God's Word. We need to apply ourselves to the study and application of God's truth.

So Jesus loves us in a purposeful way. His purpose is to remove sin and sin's penalty and to restore us to the person God originally created us to be...a person made in God's holy image and likeness.

Before we finish, don't miss **v.27 - to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.** The church is the bride of Christ. Like medieval tales, our bridegroom is the perfect prince charming. But we are like the dirty uncouth peasant girl who has captured His heart. His righteous character is radiant. But sin's destructive effects have left us dull and colorless. His garments are dazzling white and glorious. Our garments are wrinkled and spotted with filth. Yet because of His great love, Christ claimed us. He gave himself to die so we

might be saved. When we trust Him, he clothes us with His own righteousness and cleanses us from the filth and defilement of the world. And He does all of this with a view to that day when we will be united with Him forever. In **Jn.17:24** Jesus prayed this way, "**Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.**"

Because Christ loves us He wants to be with us. He promised a day would come when He would return to take us to be with Him forever. When that day arrives, He will **present (us) to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.**

Let me tell you, I'm looking forward to that day! I'm looking forward to that day when Christ's cleansing work in my sinful life is finished. I'm looking forward to that day when Christ will look into our eyes the way a bridegroom looks into the eyes of the bride He loves. When that day comes we will finally realize how much Christ loves us. His love for us is a perfect love / His love is a planned love / and His love is a purposeful love. And His love is the example for a husband's love. Don't you agree?...the bar couldn't be higher. Next Sunday we'll make the connection between the example of Christ's love and it's outworking in the love of a husband and his wife.