

## Husbands love your wives!

Eph. 5:25-33

In a book written in 1973, secular psychologist Dr. Carl Rogers made some observations about the state of marriage from his viewpoint as a humanist:

*"To me it seems that we are living in an important and uncertain age, and the institution of marriage is most assuredly in an uncertain state. If 50-75% of Ford or General Motors cars completely fell apart within the early part of their lifetimes as automobiles, drastic steps would be taken. We have no such well organized way of dealing with our social institutions, so people are groping, more or less blindly, to find alternatives to marriage (which is certainly less than 50% successful.) Living together without marriage, living in communes, extensive child care centers, serial monogamy (with one divorce after another), the women's liberation movement to establish the woman as person in her own right, new divorce laws which do away with the concept of guilt - these are all gropings toward some new form of man-woman relationship for the future. It would take a bolder man than I to predict what will emerge." Becoming Partners: Marriage and Its Alternatives, Dr. Carl Rogers*

As society drifts farther and farther away from God and the truth of His Word, the basic institutions that hold us together are unraveling. Without an underlying belief in moral absolutes determined by divine authority, we're hopelessly adrift. In the words of Pastor Jerry Vines, we are "slouching toward Sodom." Dr. John MacArthur writes, "It is difficult enough to make marriage work under the curse when most people recognize and seek to follow God's standards for morality and marriage. It is immeasurably more difficult when most people mock these standards. The only ones who can survive such a wicked and perverse generation are Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit." As darkness settles in around us, we who know God's truth have a great opportunity to let Christ be the difference-maker in our relationships.

This morning we return to **Eph. 5** where Paul addressed God's design for relationships. As we discovered earlier, the foundation is stated in the command of **5:18 - Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.** Marriages that are stable and mutually satisfying are increasingly hard to find. The fact is...God's design for a man and his wife isn't possible apart from the truth of His Word and the enablement of His Spirit. That's why the command to be **filled with the Spirit** is foundational. Instead of consuming alcohol or using drugs to alter reality or suppress negative emotions, Jesus said in **Jn. 7:38 - Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.** This inner supply of life and contentment is what the Spirit produces. This is echoed in **Eph. 5:19-21** in the effects in a life where God's Spirit is given control. **Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make 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 to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

As we considered these verses, we borrowed an analogy from baseball where a base runner may only advance one base at a time. First base is the Spirit's filling in **v.18**. Second base is a Spirit filled life...a heart filled with praise / a thankful disposition / and a willingness to submit to others out of reverence for Christ. Third base is the relational commands that follow from **5:22-6:9**. The logic of this passage flows from individual responsibility to relational responsibility. In other words, in order to relate to others as God wants us to, each believer must continuously be filled with His Spirit.

The specific commands concerning marriage are given in **5:22-33**. Wives are addressed first in **vs. 22-24 - 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.**

Ever since the curse at the time of the fall, marriage has been subject to tension. Because Adam was made first, he was responsible to take the lead in a partnership of equals. Eve wasn't created from Adam's skull to be over him. Nor was she created from his foot to be under him. She was made from his rib to be next to him. When Adam first laid eyes on Eve he knew God had given him a perfect companion. He said, "**This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man.**" He was lonely and incomplete without her.

Without any hint of inferiority, Eve was created to be Adam's helper even as one of the Lord's titles is the "helper" of His people. Before sin entered the picture, Adam and Eve lived for each other in perfect fulfillment of their created purpose. Adam's leadership was a manifestation of his consuming love for Eve and Eve's submission was a manifestation of her love for Adam. In the interest of restoring marriage to its original design God's Spirit inspired Paul to write these NT instructions. Here the vital and intimate connection between a man and his wife is compared to Christ and His church. Just as the church respects and submits to Christ, a wife is challenged **to submit to her husband in everything**. The ideal couple relate as one with lives bound together by mutual commitment and concern. The **one flesh** relationship replicates the image and likeness of God, our Triune Creator.

In **vs.25-33**, Paul shifts from the responsibility of wives to the responsibility of husbands. And once again, to fulfill his responsibility a man must be **Spirit filled**. He isn't prepared or equipped to be the loving leader his wife needs apart from a living and personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Let's read **vs. 25-33 - 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.**

Before we get into the text itself, let me make two observations. I can substantiate the first one, but the second is a really just a guesstimate based on experience.

- First, note that the instruction to husbands occupies more than twice as much space as the instruction given to wives. Had you noticed that? In the New International Version, 58 words address wives and 154 words address husbands. (You wonder how a pastor spends his time!) But why are these instructions so disproportional? I'm quite sure it isn't because men are more avid readers than women. We're the ones who take pride in doing things without reading the instructions! A better explanation may relate to our role as leaders. After Adam and Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, God came looking for Adam. **Gen. 3:9 - But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"** Adam was responsible. Another reason men need a thicker handbook is because this command is so hard for us to get right. God used 154 words to convey one essential command... **husbands love your wives!** To explain the command in a way that had a chance of penetrating our thick skulls, the Lord said we must love like Jesus loves. But if that's too lofty and theological, God brings the cookies to a lower shelf by saying, we must love a wife the way we love ourselves. Then I say, "OK. When you put it that way, I don't like it, but I think I get it."
- But a second observation is closely related to the first. It's an observation made by a veteran pastor who dealt with many married couples during the course of his ministry.

Speaking to his own son...he said, "85% of all marriage problems stem from a husband's failure to be the loving man God calls him to be." 85%! Now I can't substantiate that, but from my experience, I tend to agree. While sin's curse makes it challenging for a wife to submit to her husband, the challenge is extreme when her husband who is self-centered and loveless. Give her a man who loves her more than he loves himself and she's more inclined to respect him and submit to the leadership he provides. But far and away, the most difficult challenge in these verses...is for a selfish man like me to love his wife as Christ loves the church and to love her the same way he loves himself. Because this is the more difficult challenge, 154 words to 58 are certainly not too many! Do I hear an "Amen?"

After the instructions are supported by examples and illustrations, **v.33** sums up the passage this way...**However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.** If you haven't benefitted from the Love and Respect book or DVD series, I highly recommend it. Dr. Eggerichs points out that a woman wants to be loved unconditionally more than anything in the world. She's wired to respond to a man who cherishes her. And more than anything else, men crave honor and respect. We want to be our wife's rescuer...her hero. (Why do you think men wear Superman pajamas and sweat shirts advertizing some championship team? It's called "greatness by association." We wear them because we hope our wives will catch on.)

But here's how it works...a wife tends to respect her husband more when he really loves her. And he tends to love her more when she respects him. Dr. Eggerichs calls this the "energizing cycle" where marriage is satisfying and God is honored. Her respect is fueled by his love and his love is fueled by her respect. But the Love and Respect series also exposes the "crazy cycle". I'm sure every couple has been caught in its vortex at one time or another. She shows him some form of disrespect (like making fun of his Superman pajamas) and he reacts in an unloving way. As she is sent reeling by his loveless behavior, she reacts with more disrespect. And of course, her disrespect doesn't help him feel the love. Do you think Dr. Eggerichs is on to something? He deprives her of what she wants most...so she reacts with disrespect. He reacts to her disrespect in a way that's even more unloving...and the wheel nearly flies off the axle.

The point is this...while submission and respect are unnatural and challenging for a woman, Christ's kind of love is impossible for a selfish, fallen man! Yet if a man can learn to love his wife by the grace of God and the enablement of His Spirit, in most cases his wife will find it easy to submit to his headship. As with other positions of leadership, the buck stops here. It rests on the shoulders of men who either refuse or accept the challenge to love a wife as Christ has loved us.

Now in the event that you tuned me out because you're not married, a command Jesus gave should pull you back in. In **Jn. 13:34** Jesus said something that applies to every one of us. He said, "**A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**" Notice the standard for our love...Jesus said, "**As (or in the same way that) I have loved you, so you must love one another.**" Here's a thought...no one is prepared for marriage who hasn't learned to love others according to Christ's command. My advice to young ladies is this..."Find a guy who loves others. But let's turn to the text itself. Here God says a husband should love his wife four ways.

### **1. Love her in a self-sacrificing way - v. 25 - Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her**

The example of Christ's love is clear. Jesus **loved the church and gave himself up for her.** The Son of God didn't sit up in heaven with a heart bursting with and loving sentiment and good intentions. He came down to earth where He suffered rejection, injustice and terrible cruelty. He voluntarily went to Calvary's cross where He bore our sin and died the death we deserved.

No display of love will ever be greater than the sacrifice of Christ. Human love tends to be object-oriented. A person is loved because of physical attractiveness / personality / charm / prestige / or some other characteristic. But Christ's love wasn't like that. Sin made us hideous to our Creator...but He loved us anyway. *God's love says more about the lover than the ones loved!* Listen to **Rom. 5:6-8** where Paul declares the extreme love of God. **You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** Christ loved us by putting our need ahead of his own. He put our welfare ahead of His right to escape death. In **John 15:13** Jesus said, **Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.**

Now before we drift too far out into the depths of theory, let's row back to land. **Eph. 5:25** says, **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.** That means we must love our wives in a self-sacrificing way. It means our love must not be based on what she is or isn't. It's a bonus when a wife happens to be gorgeous / winsome / kind / gentle / intelligent / and a fantastic cook...like my wife. (Is she listening?) But we must not love her because of those attributes or things she does for us. We must love her because it's God's will that we love her. And listen, when our lives are controlled by God's Spirit, we will love her God's way! And as we obey the Lord's instructions and practice loving her in a self-sacrificing way, guess what happens. Loving feelings will grow and intensify. How can we know that? Because Jesus said, **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Lk. 12:34)** Do try this at home. Treat your wife like she is your most valuable treasure and see what happens.

But here's the \$64,000 question. *Would you die for your wife?* Today we stand in awe of the men and women who give their lives for to protect and preserve our welfare and freedom. It may seem sensational and hypothetical to ask if a man if he would die for his wife since most of us will never be put in that situation. But a willingness to die is what love requires. It's the test set before us every day of married life.

Let me try to explain. Suppose a husband comes home from work exhausted and eager to relax. But when he steps inside the door of his castle the scene is anything but relaxing. The laundry and dishes are piled high and the kids have trashed the place. Supper isn't ready and the garbage cans are still out at the curb. His natural response is to complain and find fault with his wife's time management and house keeping. He's sure he knows the story...she spent the day on the sofa watching soap operas and eating Bon Bons. This has happened before! The mess triggers an attitude of superiority that lashes out with criticism. If she thinks he's gonna lend a hand and stoop to do "woman's work," she's sadly mistaken! He worked all day and now this is "his time!" Its not gonna happen!

But is that how partners do life together? Note: "partners." Is that how a loving husband should respond? Somebody needs to die here...and I'm not talking about the man's wife. God's kind of love is held up as a model for times just like this. In **I Cor. 13:4-8** we read, - **Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.**

Now this is just a sample scenario. The list of possible scenarios is countless. Author Gary Thomas tells how he made elaborate plans to watch a championship game on television only to learn his wife planned for him to take her to the mall. He says he hates the mall! I'm with him on that! So how does love respond and what does it cost to love the way Christ loves? It costs our life. It involves dying to self for the sake of our mate. Love calls a husband to sacrifice and put his wife's needs / wants / opinions / and interests ahead of his own. Does this come naturally? Absolutely not!

Do any of us do it perfectly? It's doubtful. But love is a choice. And the power that enables us to make the choice and behave in a loving way is from Christ whose Spirit indwells all who believe. The husband who comes home to a scenario like the one I described must remember he's a man under orders. God is the One who commands him to love his wife! Even when our natural response is otherwise, we must obey. We must choose to love our wife in a self-sacrificing way just as Christ has loved us. And yes, "it will cost his life." But listen to what happens...when a man sacrifices for his wife, he doesn't become her slave...he becomes her hero! Just think of the opportunity that guy has if he comes to her aid. If he chooses to love her sacrificially, "the energizing cycle" is set in motion. He doesn't love her for the benefits, but the respect his love earns is like money in the bank!

**2. Love her in a purposeful way - v.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.**

v.25 instructs a husband to love his wife intentionally. In vs.26, 27 we find that a husband's love must be purposeful. Again the example is Christ and His love for the Church. Jesus loves His church with an endgame in view. He gave himself to make us holy. But as the verse unfolds, Christ makes us holy so He might present us to himself a radiant church free from all corruption and defilement. To love as Christ loves means a husband's love must have a purifying effect on his wife. His duty to her goes beyond physical / material / and emotional. God calls him to minister to her spiritually. Instead of her coaxing him to attend church / read his Bible / and pray with her...he should take the lead in spiritual things. Negatively, God holds him responsible to protect his wife from influences that are defiling and evil in God's sight. A husband should take the lead in choosing the entertainment his family allows. Positively, God holds him accountable to speak truth with his closest neighbor, his wife. A husband should pray for his wife / be a positive example to her / and do all he can to encourage her to reach her potential as the woman God created her to be. That's what Christ's love does for us.

But that isn't the end of love's responsibility. Christ's ultimate objective is that we might be with Him. Jesus said in His High priestly prayer of **Jn. 17 - "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am.** At this very moment Christ is preparing a place for us in His Father's house. He said in **Jn.14:3 - And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.** Everything He does to sanctify us and make us holy is with a view to that day when we will be together with him. The take away is this...everything a husband does should purify and spiritually encourage his wife. He does this so she might be brought into a closer and more intimate relationship with His Savior and with himself. The underlying principle is this...sin always separates, but righteousness always brings us close to God and each other.

**3. Love her in a generous way - vs. 28-30 - 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.**

Earlier I suggested that God invested twice as much space instructing husbands because we're called to lead / our skulls are incredibly thick / yet God really wants His truth to penetrate. In the event that the command to love the way Christ loves is too theological and theoretical, God gave us a second example. He says, love her the same way you love yourself. If we're honest, this is something we should be able to wrap our minds around. Every man I know proves he's capable of loving sacrificially and selflessly by the way he loves himself. v.29 says, **After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it...** Never in history have men and women been so absorbed with protecting / pampering / improving / nourishing / and indulging the body!

When it comes to what we want and feel we need, we tend to be very generous. Isn't that right? I won't pretend to be your conscience, because I have plenty to think about without implicating you. But to throw out a random example, a husband may treat himself to a \$10,000 fishing boat or snow mobile or golf cart while begrudging his wife's bi-monthly hair appointment. Who would do such a thing? Do you get the point? Here God instructs husbands to extend the generosity he claims for himself to his wife. To **feed and care for** a wife is to nourish her. It means to refresh her and to supply her with all she needs. We're to do this just the way we do it for ourselves and just as Christ does for His bride, the Church. Remember the promise of **Phil. 4:19**. There Paul wrote...**my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus**. Husbands should have the same kind of generosity Christ extends to us. He gives according to His riches and we must too.

The point we might overlook in **v.30** is the fact that marriage results in **one flesh** just as by faith we become members of Christ's body. The point made here is that a wife is vitally joined to her husband and he is vitally joined to hers. Whenever a man treats his wife in an unloving way he is treating himself that way. This is precisely the way Jesus views His relation to His church. Remember when He appeared to Saul of Tarsus. Jesus said, "**Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?**" Whenever Saul inflicted pain on Christians he was persecuting Christ Himself. This essential oneness lies at the heart of these commands. Yet there is one final way a husband should love his wife.

**4. Love her in an unbreakable way - vs. 31, 32 - "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.**

Here Paul returns to **Gen. 2** and God's original design for a man and his wife. According to **v.31**, marriage involves three movements. A man must leave his original family unit / a new unity is formed between himself and his wife / and the resulting union makes them **one flesh**. The original word for **united** in **v.31** is *proskollao*. In the language of the original text this word literally meant *to be glued or cemented together*. So by God's design, marriage breaks one set of ties to establish another. And the new unity formed by marriage is more permanent and binding than the first union. This is why God hates divorce. Divorce breaks a covenant God intends to be unbreakable and permanent!

So a husband should love his wife in a way that strengthens the bond between them. He must do all he can to assure his wife that his promise to keep himself only for her...is rock solid. He should do all he can to defuse conflict and eliminate any barriers between them. Ultimately, he should remove the "d word" from their vocabulary and plan to be hers until separated by death.

These are God's instructions for husbands. We must love our wives in a self-sacrificing way / we must love her in a purposeful way / we must love her in a generous way / and finally, we must love her in an unbreakable way. And none of this is possible apart from the filling of God's Spirit.

As we finish, I want to share a YouTube clip that is touching and humorous at the same time. "This good old dad loves his daughter and puts into words the sentiment of every father on his daughter's wedding day. His words remind me of our heavenly Father who entrusts each husband with the responsibility to lovingly care for the daughter He loves. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyqBTHk6pBk>