

## “GOD’S WORD TO HUSBANDS” (Ephesians 5:25-33)

Today we’re going to talk, as we did last week, about marriage. Last week we talked about God’s word to wives, and this week it’s the husband’s turn. Most people will get married at some point in life and most find that it is the ultimate test of love and sacrifice. I remember a skit that a couple did at my home church growing up. It had to do with the changes that take place in a marriage during the first seven years, and centered on the reaction of a husband to his wife catching a cold each year. It went something like this:

**The first year** the husband says: “Sugar dumpling. I’m really worried about my little baby girl. You’ve got a bad sniffle. I want to put you in the hospital for a complete checkup. I know the food is lousy, but I’ve arranged for your meals to be sent up from your favorite Italian restaurant.”

**The second year:** “Listen, sweetie, I don’t like the sound of that cough. I’ve called Dr. Miller and he’s going to rush right over. Now you go get some rest.”

**The third year:** “Maybe you’d better lie down, honey. There’s nothing like a little rest if you’re feeling bad. I’ll bring you something to eat. Have you got any canned soup?”

**The fourth year:** “Look, dear. Be sensible. After you’ve fed the kids and washed the dishes you’d better lie down.”

**The fifth year:** “Why don’t you take a couple of aspirin?”

**The sixth year:** “Why don’t you just gargle or something instead of sitting around barking like a seal?”

**The seventh year:** “For heaven’s sake, stop sneezing. What are you trying to do, give me pneumonia?”

Every married couple knows that the person you fell in love with and was so wonderful during courtship and the early stages of marriage is not exactly the same person you live with seven years later. No marriage this side of heaven will be perfect, but the problems in marriage are not the fault of the institution of marriage. The marriage relationship as originally given by God still works if we follow His design.

One of the primary teachings on marriage in the Bible is found in Ephesians 5. Here God gives instructions to both wives and husbands, and when each does their part there is peace and harmony, and together they bring glory to God before a watching world. This is not the only instruction on marriage in the Bible, but this passage focuses on two primary responsibilities of wives and husbands, and it’s summarized in 5:33... “However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” If you take away anything from these two messages remember that the key thing you can do as a wife is *respect* your husband, and the key thing you can do as a husband is *love* your wife. God expects each to do what they’re supposed to do regardless of what the other person does. Our motivation is to obey God and be the best husband or wife out of reverence for Him.

In Ephesians 5, three verses are written to wives and nine verses are written to husbands. You could say that husbands need more instruction – that is probably true – and you could also say that God holds husbands to a higher responsibility as the head of the home – and when you do what God asks you to do, it will much it much easier for her to do what God asks her to do. Let’s begin by getting an overview of verses 25-33, and then we’ll dive deeper into what it means.

Paul writes, “Husbands, love your wives (here is the main theme of these verses, and everything after this explains what it means to love your wife... Paul goes on to give two powerful illustrations of love so that we can grasp exactly what it means... the first is Christ’s love for the church – those He has saved and called out from the world to be His own),

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.

(Now in verses 28-32 Paul gives a second illustration why husbands are to love their wives – love them as you love your own body)... 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 their own body, but they feed and care for their body, 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.

(Then in verse 33 Paul gives a summary statement to both wives and husbands) However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

The primary instruction to husbands is simple: love your wives. After instructing wives to submit to their husbands, you would expect Paul to say, “Husbands, rule over your wives.” Instead, he says, “Love your wives.” In the first century, when Paul wrote these words, the idea of husbands loving their wives was revolutionary – it was unheard of. In ancient culture women had no rights at all, and were seen more as a possession than a person. All decisions were made by their husbands. It was a man’s world. And in many parts of the world, this is still true.

But Christianity gave women a freedom and dignity they had never known before. Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This verse does not change the God-given role of wives to submit and respect their husbands, but it elevates women as equal in the eyes of God in terms of dignity and value – something women in Paul’s day did not have. For Paul to say, “Husbands, love your wives,” brought a whole new mutual respect to the marriage relationship.

The Greek language used two primary words for love. One was *phileo*, and *phileo* love is the kind of love that says, “I love you because of... because of how you make me feel, because of how you look or because of what you do for me.” It’s the kind of love that is romanticized in movies and songs – it’s a feeling, it’s a high, it’s the thrill of falling in love. Do you remember the first time you had a crush on someone? I remember my first crush was in seventh grade – a girl named Jeanie – and every time I saw Jeanie, I had a powerful, intense feeling I had never had before. Unfortunately, she did not share these intense feelings for me, and then I had another intense feeling of being dumped.

*Phileo* love is conditional – “I love you because...” But the word for love Paul uses in verse 25 is *agape*. *Agape* love says, “I love you in spite of... in spite of the irritating things you do, in spite of your imperfections and weaknesses, in spite of how you treat me, I love you for better or for worse.”

Most couples head into marriage with a *phileo* love. Christian psychologist Larry Crabb said he pictured a bride and groom standing before the pastor, looking into each other’s eyes and thinking, “I’ve met someone who can meet my deepest needs. I’m empty and need to be filled. You’ve got a job to do. Let’s call it love and get married!” Larry Crabb referred to this as a “tick on a dog relationship.” In some marriages you have two ticks and no dog.

*Agape* love is not a feeling, but a choice to seek the highest good of the other person regardless of what you get in return. Nice, romantic feelings in marriage are important and wonderful, but it doesn’t sustain a marriage like *agape* love does.

Agape love does not come naturally to any of us – by nature we are selfish and self-absorbed – and we need a model of what this kind of love looks like, and in verse 25 Paul gives us the supreme example of agape love... “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” For believers, marriage is not just any other relationship – it is an earthly picture of Christ’s relationship with His church. The church, as you’ll remember, is not a building or a club, it’s a group of people that God has called out of the world to be saved and set apart to Him.

Marriage, some have said, is like a drama being played out before a watching world that pictures the union Christ has with His church. The husband plays the role of Christ, who sacrificially loved the church and gave His life for her – and the wife plays the role of the church who submits to Christ as the head or authority. When each one plays their role correctly, there is oneness and unity and together they display to the world what it means to have a relationship with Christ.

Notice two ways Christ loved the church. First, He loved her sacrificially. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Christ did not love us because we were lovable, He loved us while we were rebellious sinners – and made the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf by dying on a cross.

As husbands, we are to love our wives the same way. “Greater love has no man,” Jesus said, “Than he lay down his life for a friend.” I’m pretty sure that every husband here this morning would be willing to lay your life down for your wife. That’s how God wired us. But it’s a little harder to lay down your rights, your independence, your comfort, and your time.

I have read that 70-80% of divorces are initiated by wives, and I have found this to be true in couples I’ve worked with. Wives are more easily dissatisfied in marriage, and many husbands do not realize the depth of their dissatisfaction until it’s too late – her heart has grown cold and she’s moved on. A big part of sacrificial love is being tuned into the needs and desires of our wives, which we’ll talk more about in a moment.

Verses 26-27 goes on to say that Christ’s love for the church is not only sacrificial, it is purposeful... “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 husband’s goal in loving his wife is the same goal as Christ has for His church – to make her make her bloom into all that God wants her to be.

Christ’s grand goal or purpose for the church is to make her holy. To be holy means to be set apart from sin and to be like God. This takes us all the way back to 1:4 where it says, “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” God takes us where we are – unholy sinners separated from Him – and He begins a life-long process of transforming us so that one day in heaven we will be presented to God as holy and blameless.

The process of making us holy begins at the moment of salvation when God cleanses us from sin by the washing with water through the word. In the Old Testament, washing with water was symbolic of holiness, much like baptism in the New Testament is symbolic of the washing away of our sin.

Here Paul says that we are cleansed by the washing of the word – meaning the gospel. When we hear the gospel message that Christ died for our sins, and we trust Christ as our Savior from sin, He forgives us and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Then He begins a lifetime process of becoming holy – of separating ourselves from sin – and becoming more like Christ.

The end goal, verse 27 says is... “to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” This speaks of the day when Christ returns from heaven for His church. and the book of Revelation talks about the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, when we as the bride of Christ will be united forever with Christ in heavenly marriage. On this side of heaven we have stains, we have wrinkles and blemishes – but on that grand day when Christ returns for His church, we will at last be made holy and blameless for all eternity.

Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church. Love her as she is, as an imperfect, fallen person just as you are. Love her unconditionally, in spite what you get in return. Love her sacrificially, laying down your time and interests and desires to meet her deepest needs. And love her purposefully, helping her to bloom as a person and be all that Christ made her to be.”

In verses 28-32 Paul moves on to a second illustration to help us understand what it means for husbands to love their wives. Verses 28-29 says, “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 their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church.”

It’s very natural and normal to pay attention to our bodies. If we’re hungry, we eat – if we’re thirsty, we quench our thirst – if the temperature is too cold or too hot, we make sure it is just right – we make sure our bodies are comfortable and cared for. This is especially true when you’re single – you only have yourself to care for and you carefully tend to your every need and desire. Everything changes when you get married. A husband and wife are not just two people living under the same roof with a legal contract – marriage blends two lives into one life, two bodies in to one body, so that it’s no longer about “me” but about “we.” Given this intimate bond, husbands should love their wives as they love their own bodies – paying attention to her needs and desires as you do your own.

We all know what it’s like when our bodies hurt – you hit your thumb with a hammer and the pain shoots through your whole body. Since your wife is a part of your body, when you neglect her, you’re hurting yourself. When you attack her with harsh words, you’re attacking yourself. On the positive side, when you pay attention to her needs and treat her like you want to be treated, you reap the positive benefits. Since you are one body, you want to do what is in the best interests of her and yourself.

Paul uses two words in verse 29 to describe how a husband is to love his wife as his own body – he is to **feed her** (which means to nourish) and **care for her** (which means to meet her needs). Whereas men are fueled by respect, women are fueled by being loved and cared for.

A fascinating verse is found in Deuteronomy 24:5... it says, “If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married.” It is in the best interests of husbands to keep their wives’ happy. As the saying goes, “If mama’s not happy, nobody’s happy.”

Part of what makes mama happy is learning how she is uniquely wired and what communicates love to her. 1 Peter 3:7a says, “Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way.” Be a student of your wife and understand what she needs to be happy.

One of the best books I have read on marriage, and it's been out for some time now, is *His Needs, Her Needs* by Willard Harley. After counseling thousands of couples, Dr. Harley saw a consistent pattern in the needs of both spouses. He identified the top five needs of a wife as...

Number one: Affection – A wife wants to be treasured and valued, and how that is expressed is different for each woman. For some it is hearing words of affirmation – for others it is physical touch – for some it is acts of service – for others it is quality time – and others it's receiving gifts. Find out what your wife's love language is and learn to speak her language.

Number two: Conversation – Men are wired to complete projects and solve problems, and sometimes forget that marriage is a relationship. When men do talk, they like to talk about how pour concrete and catch fish. Women like to talk about family and relationships. They thrive on deep, meaningful conversations – they want to hear what you have to say and they want you to hear what they have to say. They don't want you to fix their problems as much as they want to be heard and understood.

Number three: Honesty and openness – Wives want to know what their husbands are feeling and that they find words to express it. A lot of women like dating men who are quiet and mysterious, but when they marry you, they want to know what's going on inside – they need you to open up.

Number four: Financial support – Wives need to feel secure that the bills can be paid and that they are provided for.

Number five: Family commitment – They want to know that when dad comes home, he is mentally and emotionally there. We hear a lot about “quality time,” but nothing can replace “quantity time.” No one ever said at the end of his life, “I wish I had spent more time at work or making more money.” What many say is, “I wish I had been there more for my family. I wish I had played more with my kids and spent more time with my wife.” Keep mama happy and you will have a happy home.

In verses 30-32 Paul drives home the point that Christ is one with His church, the husband is one with his wife... “For we are members of his body (speaking of Christ's 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.”

The body was one of Paul's favorite metaphors for the church. The body is a great picture of the church because the body is one entity with several functions. As we come together as a church, we are all different in personalities and abilities and perspectives, but we are united together as one body in Christ. Earlier in Ephesians Paul called the church a “mystery,” and here he calls it a “profound mystery.” A mystery in the Bible meant something that was once hidden but now is revealed. The fact that God would take different groups of people – Jews and Gentiles – and bring them together to make up the body of Christ was something the Old Testament prophets and saints could not conceive, but now was a reality.

In the same way that the church is one with Christ, so too are husbands and wives made one in marriage. In verse 31 Paul quotes Genesis 2:23, that when a man is united to his wife, the two become one flesh. God could have created Eve any number of ways, but He chose to take her from the flesh and bone of Adam – from his side – and create her as someone who corresponded to and complimented Adam. Eve was literally of Adam's flesh and bone.

To be “one flesh” means that just as our bodies are one whole entity and cannot be divided into pieces and still be a whole, so too in the marriage relationship there are no longer two entities (two individuals), but one entity (a married couple). The marriage relationship supersedes all other relationships and serves as a picture of Christ’s relationship with the church.

In verse 33 Paul summarizes God’s will for husbands and wives... “However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” Another key Christian book on marriage is called *Love and Respect* by Emerson Eggerich, who like Willard Harley has worked with marriage couples for decades, and concluded through extensive research that the number one, primary need of a husband is *respect*, and the number one, primary need of a wife is *love*. What do you know? God knew exactly what He was doing when He designed the unique roles and responsibilities in marriage.

Respect is what motivates a man, and love is what motivates a woman. What gets a man in a fighting mood is when he feels disrespected, and what makes a woman to rise up is when she feels unloved. It creates what Eggerich calls a “crazy cycle” where the wife – feeling unloved will be disrespectful – and the husband – feeling disrespected will be unloving. Each operates out of a vacuum of unmet desires and rather than focusing on the needs of the other, each is driven to get their own need met.

Emerson says that neither spouse is usually aware of what motivates them to this stalemate. Without realizing it, the man thinks, “I’m not about to change until she gives me more respect.” In turn the wife thinks, “Fat chance I’m going to respect him if he doesn’t care about me.”

What Ephesians 5 does is to put the responsibility of marriage squarely on each husband and each wife, so that you don’t focus on what the other person should do, you only focus on what God has called you to do. You live out your role before a watching world even if your mate doesn’t live up to their role. You do it because it’s what Christ did for you. God wants husbands to lead the way – to lay down your life – your rights, your independence, your comfort, your time – in order to build up your wife and help her to be all that Christ made her to be. He wants you to love your wife as you love your own body – to understand her, to study her, and know what communicates love to her.

When you do this, you will likely find a wife who gladly submits, who respects you – and you both benefit. More importantly, you picture what a relationship with Christ looks like, and bring glory to God before a watching world.