

What's a Husband to Do? • Ephesians 5:25–33

While God calls upon every Christian to love one another, he especially calls upon husbands to love their wives. So we ask the question, What's a husband to do? And we hear God's answer, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church."

A generation ago, Dr. Harry Ironside was the pastor of the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. One day a recently married man came to him for counsel. The young man said, "Brother Ironside, I want your help. I am in an awful state. I am drifting into idolatry."

"What is the trouble?" Ironside asked.

The young man replied, "Well, I am afraid I am putting my wife on too high a plane. I am afraid I love her too much, and I am displeasing the Lord."

"Are you indeed?" his pastor asked. "Do you love her more than Christ loved the church?"

"I don't think so," he said.

Dr. Ironside told him, "Well, that is the limit, for we read, 'Husbands' love your wives as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.' You cannot get beyond that. That is a self-denying love, a love that makes one willing even to lay down his life for another."

We can't begin to mine all the gold in these last nine verses of Ephesians 5. So, we must reluctantly be satisfied with listing four descriptions of the kind of love that a Christian husband is to have for his wife.

The first description is in verse 25 where we are told that the husband is to have a sacrificial love for his wife, "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

Christ died for the church! You can't be more sacrificial than that!

Remember that the church is not the building or the organization; the church is us - - - you and I are the church for whom Christ died. At the time he died for us, we were in rebellion and reaction, in principle and in practice, to Jesus Christ

who so sacrificially loved us.

Christ's sacrifice included a loss of power and a loss of prestige and a loss of comfort. He was humiliated and he died an agonizing death. It was some kind of great love. It was sacrificial love.

In a like manner, husbands are exhorted to love their wives with that kind of sacrificial love. Husbands, would you die for your wife? God calls upon Christian husbands to be willing to make that kind of sacrifice for their wives!

There is little likelihood that any of us would ever be called upon to go quite that far, but instead there are millions of lesser ways that we can love sacrificially. The examples abound.

You can spend time doing what your wife wants to do when it means sacrificing the time that you would spend doing what you want to do. You could, for example, give up the first day of hunting or fishing season to be with her. Watch her favorite TV program instead of Monday night football. Go to the restaurant she enjoys instead of expecting her to cook. Pick up and clean up instead of expecting her to do it for you. Make do with less money yourself so that she can have more. Don't ever expect her to go to church alone when you can accompany her. Allow her to win the argument just because you love her.

Husbands, hear well: you tend to be into the big things; she's into the little things!

You think you prove your love by buying a car for her, but she thinks you prove your love to her by holding her hand. You

think you prove your love to her by getting ahead in the company and making a bigger salary, but she simply wants to hear you say, "I love you". You think you prove your love to her by sending her a dozen expensive roses, but she yearns to have you love her through giving her security that the bills are paid. You think you prove your

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love to her by ordering a giant-sized pizza, but she wishes you would show your love to her by losing some weight and preserving your health.

Husbands must be careful lest they misname sacrifice and merely do what they want in a manipulative way that is supposed to impress the wife.

Stop long enough to ask yourself if you daily evidence the kind of sacrificial love for your wife that Christ demonstrated for us, his church.

What are you going to change? What are you going to do? “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

That kind of love, in addition to being a sacrificial love, is described in verses 26 and 27 as a perfecting love. Christ’s love for his church is always helping, always healing, always purifying, always cleansing, always beautifying, always up-building. In fact, one of the greatest joys of the Christian life is knowing that Jesus Christ is always working to help us, improve us and to present us in the best possible light. The more we are with him and the more we know of his love for us, the better we become. Jesus Christ provides salvation, baptism, instruction, forgiveness and much more to make us perfect and beautiful for that day when we will forever be together with him in heaven. And husbands are to have that same kind of perfecting love for their wives.

Here’s a great practical test for your love. Has your love perfected your wife? Has it made her more beautiful, more generous, more gracious, more knowledgeable, more godly, more loving, more kind than ever she used to be?

True love always builds up — it never degrades; it never demeans; it never mars; it never hurts. True love is a great refiner and purifier of life. True love makes beautiful.

Whenever I hear a husband criticize his wife — putting her down because of the way she looks or behaves — I think to myself, “That poor guy has never learned how to love a woman as he should. If he had, his love would have made her an object of his adoration.”

Husbands, what are you going to do to perfect your wives as Christ perfects the church?

Do you share spiritual truths with her? Do

you pray with her? Do you go to church with her? Do you know her spiritual gifts and encourage her to use them? Do you praise her for her spiritual growth? Do you daily pray that your wife will be a woman of God?

And not just spiritually, but emotionally. Tell her how important she is. Tell her that you love her. Praise her every virtue and be sensitive to her every need. Don’t take advantage of her when she’s down. Give her security when she’s uncertain. Give her strength when she’s weak. One serious creative word of praise every day could revolutionize your marriage! Try it!

Physically, be sure that you provide what is necessary for her health and for her beauty and for her self-confidence. Beware of criticizing the way she dresses when her clothes money has been subsidizing your car payments. Sell the car! Meet her needs sexually. Hold her; hug her; touch her.

Pray, think, plan. Find and implement ways to make your wife a better person. Be sensitive. Stop criticizing and start helping. Don’t nag. Be an up-builder! “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church.” A perfecting love!

And then there’s a third description in verses 28 to 30, a description of a caring love. Christ’s caring love for the church has been demonstrated for us in the most amazing way. He has stated that all believers put together make up a body which he claims as his own. We are reckoned to be the body of Jesus Christ, and we are all members of that body. You and I are considered by Christ to be his arms, his legs, his ears, his hands, his lungs and his eyes. And that says a lot.

It says that Jesus Christ will always treat us right. No one in his right mind would intentionally damage part of his own body!

It also says that we will always be secure. Everyone in Christ’s body is secure forever because Jesus Christ is committed to the members of the body. We can always count on Christ taking good care of his body!

Just as Christ lovingly cares for the church, husbands are to lovingly care for their wives. The idea here is not that we are to treat our wives as we treat our own bodies, because in some cases that would be mistreatment. The idea here is that husbands are to treat their wives as Christ treats

his body, the church.

The Greek word that is used here for love is the verb *agapao*. It means seeking the highest good for the one that is loved. Husbands are to love themselves, seeking the highest good for themselves, but we are also to love our wives in the same way.

Let me share with you an illustration which will offend some wives, but I think it will communicate pretty well with husbands. I went to college with and work with and live near a guy named Marv Nelson. Marv grew up without having very much in a material sense.

He was a terrifically hard worker and he saved up enough money to buy a brand new black '65 Mustang, black. It was a beautiful car. And he loved it! He took great care of it. He washed it every day, summer and winter. He paste-waxed it with Simonize every week, 52

times a year. That car was so slippery that when it rained the rain wouldn't even bead up on the hood, it just slid right off the car! When the weather was bad, he walked. He wasn't going to risk hurting his car. No one else was allowed to drive it. He loved his car. And I suppose that, in a sense, he had made that car an extension of himself and his own personality.

Now, if the ladies will forgive me for drawing an analogy here, husbands, you are to love your wives as Marv loved that car. Nourish your wife; cherish her. Build rituals into your routine that provide for her. Inconvenience yourself rather than risk her in any way. Make her your pride and joy, an extension of yourself.

How do you do that? You know the ways to care for her better than anyone else. Treat her as Christ treats the church. Always treat her right. Let her know she's always secure. You would sooner cut off your right arm than lose her. Never belittle her. Never allow any talk of separation or divorce. Always take her side. Insist on the best for her - - - her sleep, her health, her job. Just care for her as you would your most prized possession, as you would care for yourself. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the

church."

Verse 31 speaks of a fourth description, and that is an exclusive love. Do you know that Jesus Christ has an exclusive love for the church? There can be no doubt to any reader of the New Testament that Jesus Christ has a very special relationship and love for his church. The church is that for which he died. The church is that for which he intercedes. She is called his Bride. Jesus Christ has a special, exclusive love for the church which is above and beyond and transcends his love and commitment to nature and even all the angels of heaven.

And husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

Ephesians 5:31 is a quotation of Genesis 2:24. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one

flesh." This is THE central teaching of the Bible regarding marriage. It is this verse that Jesus quoted in his famous teaching about marriage and divorce in Matthew 19. In one sentence this verse teaches that the marriage relationship takes precedence over all other human relationships, that marriage is to be to only one person, that marriage is a primary commitment of life and that marriage brings a unique union of two people.

Husbands, make sure that your love for your wife is an exclusive love. Your love for her must be unquestionably greater and higher than your love for your parents, for your friends, for your business partners, for your children or your fellow church people. Husbands, you must guard the exclusivity of your love for your wife. You must continually guard your time and your thoughts and your body against any compromise of your love with any other woman or any other person. What is more, give your wife constant reassurances that there is no one else in your life and, by God's grace, there never shall be anyone else in your life except her. Tell her that she has no competition for your love and affections. I cannot emphasize too much how vitally important this is!

Husbands, hear well: you tend to be into the big things; she's into the little things!

Let me add a parenthetical comment. Beware lest you ever knowingly or unknowingly be guilty of alienating the affection between a husband and a wife!

I heartily agree with Charles Hodge who used to be a professor at Princeton Seminary. He wrote to another generation, “The greatest social crime, next to murder, is to seduce the affections of a wife from her husband or a husband from a wife.”

As Christians we must be highly sensitive that we not commit this sin! Women, be careful about the way you dress and be careful about your conversation and be careful about your seemingly innocent flirtatiousness. Be careful about your overall behavior, lest you undermine the affection between a husband and a wife because there are few sins that are more grievous!

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church.”

The relationship between Christ and the church is a profound mystery. The Greek word *mysterion*, from which we get our English word *mystery*, doesn't refer to the plot of a Nancy Drew novel. Rather, it means very deep truth revealed by God. The deep truth is that the relationship of Jesus Christ to us his church is unique, marvelous and more wonderful than we can understand.

The closest parallel we can experience is in marriage: husbands loving wives; wives respecting husbands.

Cyrus was one of the great kings of ancient Persia. Chronicles of those ancient days tell about the wife of one of Cyrus' generals being accused and convicted of treachery against the king. Her

husband came as soon as he heard what has happened. He arrived just after his wife was condemned to die.

He threw himself on the ground before Cyrus and pleaded, “O Sire, take my life instead of hers. Let me die in her place!”

Cyrus was so moved that he said, “Love like that must not be spoiled by death.” And so he reunited the couple and set her free.

As they happily walked away, the husband said to his wife, “Did you notice how kindly the king looked upon us when he gave you your free pardon?”

The wife turned and said, “I had no eyes for the king. I saw only the man who was willing to die for me.”

Husbands, “each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

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