

Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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Husbands Love Your Wives – A Prayer Request

Ephesians 5:25-27

I do not often do what I am about to do this morning. This past week was filled with events concerning marriages, the majority of which I found to be heartbreaking and devastating. And so, I am postponing our Colossians series to address with you something that is heavy upon my heart. To begin with, on a national scale, apart from the will of the people of the state of California, a lone judge denied a government of the people, by the people, for the people, by declaring that marriage, a term and institution granted humanity not by man, but by God Himself and defined by God Himself, this long judge declared it unconstitutional to define marriage as being a union only between one man and one woman. Beloved, marriage, this God given blessing that, according to Hebrews 13:4, is to be held in honor among all and that the marriage bed is to be undefiled, preserved as God defines it between one man and one woman, because God will judge all who pervert it through fornication and adultery, biblical, God-given marriage is under attack.

On the very day that this declaration was being talked about all across our country, I was on the phone with both a husband and a wife, the husband having recently committed adultery because he had feelings for another woman, determined to quit his job, move out of state in order to live with this other woman, a woman who is married herself with four children. On this very same day, another marriage very near and dear to me continued its skid out of control as the husband determined to move out because he doesn't know why God doesn't give him a love for his wife. And to top of this eventful day, I was informed that some former attenders' marriage was devastated as the husband simply moved to another state. Beloved our marriages are under attack. In addition to what I have already shared, I am aware of or engaged in a handful of other situations that at best are dealing with tensions and at worse are on the verge of melt down.

And while what I am about to say is not at the core of each and every situation, except for in the first three cases I described to you, at the heart of the issue is that by and large men are not being men, at least not men according to the design and image that God determined for them. I have had enough of men being defined by the world because in all truth, men in the image of this world are by definition not men at all, they are woeful, pitiful, sinful, fallen creatures. Rather, what this world needs now are true men, men striving to live according to the image of the True Man, that is Jesus Christ. And so, whether single or married, I say to you men, do you know what a true man looks like and are you praying for yourselves and for other men around you to aspire and arrive at that image? And I will say it to the women as well, do you know and do you pray for the men in your lives to be true godly men?

In the cases that I cited above, there has been an abdication, a giving up on the most essential definition of what a man is and the most definitive way specifically in which a husband (a man in a special position) demonstrates his manliness. Before I tell you what has been abdicated by many husbands (these men in a special position), let me say to you single men that you need not be married to be a man, a truly godly man; however if and when a man is married he then occupies the highest position and privilege that any man can possess apart from simply being a man of faith; and that position and privilege is being a man of faith who labors with all his heart, soul, mind and strength to fulfill the very simply stated yet profoundly consuming command of Ephesians 5:25. Hear the word of the Lord to husbands, these men who occupy this privileged position and title of husband:

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Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

Beloved, all men, indeed all people, are to strive to be like Christ for this is God's purpose and goal for His people, Christlikeness (Romans 8:29). But for those men who are "husbands" and for any man who aspires to be a "husband" there is, according to these verses, the highest demonstration of Christlikeness. What impacts me when reading these verses is that Paul himself, so enamored by the parallels between husbands and Christ, speaks more of Christ, he exalts Christ in the eyes of the husbands, saying in effect that if you are a husband, then your whole manhood, as well as your whole experience of Christlikeness rides on you getting this one thing right, this one thing that has many ramifications. What is that one thing? If you are a husband then love your wife...but wait, it does not simply say, love your wife, now does it? No, it says to each individual husband and to each man who aspires to be a husband, love your wife "just as"; just like; according to the very same pattern; with the same intensity, same desire, same fervency as that love with which our Lord Jesus Christ loved the church.

Beloved, when we pray for one another, we must be praying with fervency that those who are married (Hebrews 13:4) and in particular, for the husbands of those marriages, that they would be striving to love their own wives even as Christ loved the church. How can any man, any husband ever hope to accomplish this task without first knowing Christ himself and also without a constant pleading on his own behalf as well as the pleading of his brothers and sisters in Christ that he would have the grace of God to accomplish this task to the glory of God.

Beloved, my plead with you this morning is this; would you pray fervently for those believers you know who are married that their marriages would exemplify thee deep, deep love of Jesus toward the Church? That the love of the husbands you know toward their wives would be even as Christ's, vast, unmeasured, boundless and free?

Several years ago, the *Saturday Evening Post* published an article entitled "The Seven Ages of the Married Cold." It revealed the reaction of a husband to his wife's colds during their first seven years of marriage. It went something like this:

- *The first year:* "Sugar dumpling, I'm really worried about my baby girl. You've got a bad sniffle, and there's no telling about these things with all this strep throat going around. I'm putting you in the hospital this afternoon for a general checkup and a good rest. I know the food's lousy, but I'll be bringing your meals in from [The Olive Garden]. I've already got it all arranged with the floor superintendent."
- *The second year:* "Listen, darling, I don't like the sound of that cough. I called Doc Miller and asked him to rush over here. Now you go to bed like a good girl, please?"
- *The third year:* "Maybe you'd better lie down, honey: nothing like a little rest when you feel lousy. I'll bring you something to eat. Have you got any canned soup?"
- *The fourth year:* "Now look, dear, be sensible. After you've fed the kids, washed the dishes and finished the floor, you'd better lie down."
- *The fifth year:* "Why don't you take a couple of aspirin?"

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- *The sixth year:* “I wish you’d just gargle or something, instead of sitting around all evening barking like a seal!”
- *The seventh year:* “For Pete’s sake, stop sneezing! Are you trying to give me pneumonia?”

We might laugh when we hear this story, until we realize that it represents a real issue, the loss of the picture of love that lasts for a lifetime. As many of you know, Laura and I just celebrated our 22nd anniversary this past Friday and while I think I can safely say that I have never accused my wife of barking like a seal, I know that there have been many things change in our marriage, not all of the for the better.

This all got me thinking about questions all husbands ought to ask themselves. Am I still treating the woman I married with the same or with greater affection and attention as I did when I was courting her or when I was first married? Of course, I think it would be the stated goal of every husband and ought to be the prayer of every person her that each husband would grow in their demonstration of godly affection and attention toward their wives so that these marriages might be glorious pictures of the love of Christ toward His church.

This morning then I would like us to look at the picture Scripture provides for us concerning the love of Christ for His church and how each marriage, and specifically how each husband is to be a living testimony of this love as he practices it before his wife, his family and his church. Our text of Ephesians 5:25-27 presents us with an exhortation, an example and then an expectation for husbands to follow. And just in case you think that because you are not a husband, this message does not speak to you, I would beg to differ, as an very least this message provides you with specifics by which you can pray for your brothers who are husbands and at its pinnacle provides you the depths of the love of Christ for you; what He has done and is doing for you as being a part of the church for which He gave His life. So then, let us begin with our first consideration:

I. The exhortation (5:25a)

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church...

The text begins simply enough, right? **“Husbands, love your wives.”** But what is stated so simply, so mater-of-factly can be seemingly difficult. This is particularly true when we stop to ponder what is meant by the word “love”? Husbands, what do you think it means to love your wife? Many men, when asked such a question, can tend to respond with something along the lines, loving your wife is seeking to make her happy. For many men, whether consciously or not, to love their wives is their attempt to please them. But is this biblical, Christ-like love looks like?

C. S. Lewis made this observation concerning love: “... by Love ... most of us mean kindness—the desire to see others [rather] than the self happy; not happy in this way or in that, but just happy.” A bit later Lewis goes on to say that God is not like this. “God, says Lewis, does not govern the universe on such lines. And since God is Love, I conclude that my conception of love needs correction.

The reason why so many marriages are struggling; the reason why so many marriages are failing is because we often have a wrong concept of love and we are not praying for husbands to be the shining examples of truly loving their wives as Christ loved the church. When we think that loving a wife means sacrificing oneself and one’s desires to make the woman happy; then if the man thinks he can no longer maker her happy, then he stops sacrificing. Or worse yet, he get a

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perverted idea that by leaving her, he has sacrificed for her because now she can be happy without his own failings bring her down.

Don't get me wrong, I believe that true love includes kindness and sacrifice, but it doesn't stop there. In fact, let me give to you my own personal definition of love, of this godly *agape* love as described in our text and then let us see if it rings true with our text. I define love and the pursuit of love as, *“a one-way, unconditional and continual decision of the will, a decision that affects both one's actions and affections, that seeks the highest good for another, regardless of the cost and all for the glory of God.”*

So then, the exhortation to husbands in our text and the very thing we need to pray for husbands is this, “Husbands, in a one-way, unconditional and continual decision of your will, a decision that affects both your actions and your affections, seek the highest good for your wife, regardless of the cost and all for the glory of God.” This leads us to the second point:

II. The Example (5:25b)

Does our definition of the love with which husbands are to prayerfully and continually strive after ring true with Scripture? Our text conveniently provides us not only with the exhortation to love, but now also the example of love. We read again in our text, **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”** How husbands are to love their wives is founded on the example of Christ's love for the church. And when we ponder the statement, “just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” we are presented with the idea of sacrifice, of loving regardless of the cost.

What comes to your mind when you think of Christ's sacrifice for the church? Do you not see the image of the cross? Do you not think about the truth that He died for us? Husbands need prayer because they are called to sacrifice for their wives in a same manner or with the same motivation as Christ sacrificed Himself for the church. Now Christ died for the church, and I doubt that most husbands will ever be called upon to literally die for their wives. This being so, how can we rightly apply this? How ought husbands to sacrifice themselves?

To answer this question of what sacrifice is to a husband, let us first consider what sacrifice is not. To begin with, as we noted from our C.S. Lewis quote, sacrifice is not simply acts of kindness. I cannot tell you how many times I have talked to husbands, or even some single men, who upon hearing Ephesians 5:25 starting making up a list of things that the man ought to do for his wife. At a marriage conference, it is not uncommon to hear a speaker call out for examples of sacrificial acts of kindness that husbands could do for their wives. And then the game is on as someone yells out, “Do the dishes!” and another “Watch the kids!” Such a list could go on and on and included things like cleaning the bathroom, ironing, or even, for the most spiritual of the group, the giving up Monday night football. As the list grows, the men of the group are challenged because there is always something else that could be done that they haven't done. But we like the lists because with a list, we have some control, we have steps or perhaps better said, we have hoops that we come to believe if we jump through, then we will love our wives just like Christ loved the church. With a list we can check things off and feel as though we have fulfilled our obligations and our consciences are pacified. But is this truly sacrificial, regardless of the cost love?

The problem is that if we follow such steps, if we check off our lists, if we give up that hobby or even Monday Night football. If we do more chores around the house, then husband will start to think to himself, “I'm demonstrating the attitude of sacrifice.” But my concern is not the

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doing or not doing of such things, but rather, the attitude, the very heart or reason for which a husband might do such things. Could all these things be done with a spirit of self-centeredness? Could it be that if we really think about it, such things are being done to earn those proverbial brownie points because the husbands have the expectation that they will be paid back. And if they don't get paid back, what generally happens? They stop doing those things.

Beloved, we need to pray for the husbands' motivation. What motivates him to sacrifice? As someone has put it, men can either have the motivation of manipulation or of ministry. The motivation of sacrifice for manipulation means that a husband does what he does because he expects something in return; he expects to make his wife happier and therefore for her to treat him better. The idea of marriage as being a 50/50 partnership is not biblical; because while husbands and wives are certainly equal in their standing before God and there is to be loving interaction between both when decisions are made, the corporate model of a 50/50 partnership leads to manipulation, of keeping the other partner happy so that they will make you happy. But if the motivation is ministry, of seeking the highest good for another regardless of the cost, then the husband is not sacrificing for his own benefit, but for the wife's benefit. But even here we must be careful. We must pray that husbands don't get a martyr complex. For husbands could tell themselves, that they are supposed to minister, do things, expecting nothing in return and failing then to realize that in our ministering or serving our wives, there is to be a clear goal. To state this afresh, if a husband does things for his wife simply to get her to treat him better, that is manipulation and that is wrong. And, if a husband does seek to minister, or serve his wife without having a biblical goal, then that too is wrong. For while our definition of love is seeking the highest good for another regardless of the cost, let us never forget that it is always seeking the glory, the purpose, the intent of God. In other words, while a husband may be sacrificing himself and his desire to rightly minister to his wife, it is not so that he might be seen as some martyr or super saint, but rather, it is to see the wife bloom and shine with the glory and goodness of God.

And here is where some fervent prayer for our husbands and for our marriages needs to take place; because what God is demanding of husbands is that they risk themselves. When we consider the sacrifice of Christ, do we see that His death was not simply some act of kindness? When Jesus entered this world as God in the flesh, did it not come with the risk of rejection? With the risk of pain? With the risk of being hated? But He came, even though His own bride would hate Him before she would love Him; even when His own bride would cause Him grief before she would bring Him delight; even when His own bride would not serve Him before she would delightfully serve Him, Jesus, the husband, came. But He did not come simply to die and to be some kind of wonderful martyr; He came not only as an example of how husbands are to love their wives, but He came also with an expectation, our third and final point. Jesus had a goal in mind for the church and husbands are to have a similar goal for their wives. What is this expectation?

III. An Expectation (5:26-27)

In verses 26-27 we find the purpose, the goal the expectations that husbands are to rightfully have as they love their wives, one that is related to Christ's goal for the church. We read in verses 26-27 of this purpose:

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26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

Here we see that a husband's motivation to rightly and sacrificially minister to his wife for the purpose of her becoming a shining example of the power of love to transform. Just as Christ's love for the church transforms each member into a spotless, glorious, holy and blameless monument of God's working in the believer's life, so the husband is to strive to present his wife to God in the beauty or perfection of holiness.

The expectation of love, of a husband's love for his wife, is for the perfecting of the wife in the love of God. Let us see how our text moves us to consider this most noble and most loft goal as it is presented in terms of what Christ is doing for the church. There are three purposes of Christ for His church in these verses that in a small part are to be the husbands' purposes for his wife.

First, Christ purpose is to **sanctify** the church. The word "sanctify" means "to set apart for a special purpose." When a man marries a woman, he has set her apart from the world. They are set apart for special protection, special care, for special attention, for a special purpose. This is what happens when those two make their vows and say, "I do". The husband, in particular, is saying, "I take you, and you alone, out of all the women in the world and set you apart that I might pour out upon you my special attention, affection and devotion.

But even this attention and affection has a purpose, our second purpose, as seen in the next phrase, **"that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing."** Here the husband takes it upon himself, through his own personal growth and knowledge of the Word of God, to bathe and cleanse his wife in the life nourishing Word of God. Any husband who does not seek to guide or encourage his wife in the Scriptures is not truly a husband and ought not to expect her to bloom and flourish, at least not in a way that would be pleasing to him.

The third purpose of the husbands' affection and attention for his wife that follows the pattern of Christ's affection and attention to the church is that she would be **holy** and **blameless**. Consider that Christ love for the church is such that He is absolutely committed to removing all the blemishes so He can present her in all her glory and beauty to Himself. This is what it means to love, to seek the highest good for another, regardless of the cost and all to the glory of God. The purpose of a husband loving his wife is to seek the perfection of the beloved.

This is the clear teaching of Scripture. In Ephesians 1:4 we read "He [God] chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy and blameless* before Him." To love with God's love is to seek improvements to the glory of God.

Remember that we noted earlier that love is not simply about making someone else happy. To borrow from C. S. Lewis again, "Love demands the perfecting of the beloved." Kindness, particularly kindness for the purpose of personal gain, that idea of "if you scratch my back, I will starch yours" is the complete opposite of love. We need to pray that our husbands and that our marriages truly learn to love in the way describe in our text; a love that is a one-way, unconditional and continual decision of the will that seeks the highest good for another, regardless of the cost and all for the glory of God. The purpose of love is never to be seen as the demonstration of kindness motivated by a desire to make a wife happy. The purpose of love is the building up the wife to bring about God's purpose in her.

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That this is God's command to husbands is made clear again in 1 Peter 3:7 where we read this call to husbands, **"Live with your wives according to knowledge..."** In other words, husbands, know your wives. Know what she needs. Know what she is good at and what she is not so good at. Know her talents and help her develop them. This then needs to be our corporate prayer for our husbands, whether they are also our dads, our sons, our brothers, or our friends.

Beloved, I fear that we are not taking marriage seriously enough. Again, it does not matter whether you are married or not, marriage, because it is instituted by God, is something we need to be praying for. Do you pray for your church? Why? Because it is an institution of God, filled with people who sometimes struggle and fail. How can we do any less for our marriages; marriages that are to be the highest expression of Christ's love for the church?

It's kind of hard to give this kind of message, a random, heartfelt message on marriage and have enough time left to discuss some of the practicalities; the "how does one do this" answers. We simply do not have time. So the great practicality that I have been pushing all morning is also the one that I will end with now; beloved, since marriage is to be held in honor by all (Hebrews 13:4), would you pray for our marriages regularly? I read a statement that I cannot verify the accuracy of, but I believe it nonetheless. The statement is simply that 85% of the time problems in marriage can be traced back to the husband. The husband is the head and if something is wrong, more times than not; not always, but more times than not, the husband is responsible in some way or another. Therefore, let us pray for our husbands for the exhortation of Ephesians 5:25 is clear, "Husbands, love your wives..."

We have seen that such an exhortation is built upon the example of Christ sacrificial love for the church and that sacrifice is not give up something now to be repaid later, but rather is seeking the highest good for another regardless of the cost. And we have seen that the expectation of love is the perfecting of the beloved. In other words, husbands are God's instruments for the spiritual well-being and building up of their wives in the things of God. Let us pray for our marriages to be glorious examples of the love of Christ for His church!

CLOSING PRAYER

Father God,

We lift up to you the men in our lives who are husbands; knowing that they live with the awesome responsibility of representing Christ and His love for the Church.

We ask that You, by Your grace, help them to be the kind of husbands You want them to be. Enable them not to take their role as a husband lightly or to take their wives love for granted. Enable them to be good listeners, giving to their wives their full attention so that they will be fully aware of their concerns, aspirations and needs. Help them, we pray to pay attention to the advice their wives give when they may be doing wrong or when they could be doing better. Grant them that love that seeks their wives' highest good above their own. Grant them a keener awareness of thing that upset their beloved wives and then the determination to stop doing those things so that these husbands would not be causing unnecessary problems in their relationships.

Enable husbands to love their wives even as Christ loved the church and gave His life for her and grant them the grace to better understand and practice what it means to be a husband in the image of Christ. Grant these men, these husbands, to treat their wives better than when they first met and remind them of the importance of spending quality time alone with their wives and of doing thing that show her how important and special their wives are to them. Help these

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husbands not to jump to conclusions about their own wives' motives and enable them to think the best of their wives at all times.

Grant our husbands the humility to apologize when they are wrong and to set things straight when they complain, falsely accuse, act selfishly, or say unkind or provoking words. Help these men to be glorious examples of what a loving, considerate, caring, and self-sacrificing husband should be. Remind these husbands to realize that it is their job to be an example of spiritual maturity and not an example of a disrespectful wisecracking school boy. Enable them to be joyful in spite of their circumstances and help them avoid whining and complaining when things do not go their way. Enable these men to never forget that You gave them their wives to be their helpmate and best friend and may they never think of their wives as an adversary or a hindrance.

And Lord, by Your grace, grant our husbands the ability to show their children how much they respect and love their mothers by the actions and by the words out of these husbands' mouths. Help these husbands not to be afraid to be affectionate and loving towards their wives in front of their children so that they will know how to be good spouses when they grow up. Enable them to biblically discipline their children so they are not a burden or a grief to their wives. May their children see that their wives are truly their very best friends and their most highly trusted partner in the ministry of their families.

Lord, make our husbands the kind of men that their wives will never regret having married and even more than that, make them the kind of husband who is a joy for their wives to be around and who their wives will be proud to call their husbands, a man who honors them and who honors Christ.

We ask in Jesus name, Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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