

Marriage And The Bride Of Christ (Part 5)

The Husband's Love

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Today I am going to continue my sermon series on marriage and family. I will be talking to you about the foundation of the husband's responsibility in marriage. This present society is doing everything it can to destroy the sanctity of marriage. But, that is not the only problem. Although society has a great deal to do with marriage problems today, there is a more intensely-felt reason for such misery. Most men are not men; and most men are not good husbands.

A Protestant minister who began his mentoring to men around 1990, and has since then mentored thousands of men, began his ministry with the belief that it was society that had corrupted men, and brought the near end of real gentlemen and good husbands. But, after years of study and experience, he found that men themselves are to blame, because they had not given enough time and effort to learning how to be real gentlemen, to be true Christian men. After almost twenty years, his findings were that they are not trying hard enough to become men of sterling character.

He said that he also found that the mainstream Christian churches had even hampered men from becoming righteous men, by teaching a message of passivity. This has encouraged men to have no backbone, to be wishy-washy, and to have no conviction to leadership in marriage and family.

In the July/August 2010 issue of *The Atlantic* magazine, there is an article written by Hanna Rosin titled 'The End of Men.' On page 70, she quotes sociologist Kathryn Edin:

Thirty years ago, cultural norms were such that the fathers might have said, 'Great, catch me if you can.' Now they are desperate to father, but they are pessimistic about whether they can meet her expectations." The women do not want them as husbands, and they have no steady income to provide. So what do they have? "Nothing," Edin says. "They have nothing. The men were just annihilated in the recession of the 90s, and things never got better. Now it is just awful."

The situation today is not, as Edin likes to say, a "feminist nirvana." The phenomenon of children being born to unmarried parents "has spread to barrios and trailer parks and rural areas and small towns," Edin says, and it is creeping up the class ladder. After staying steady for a while, the portion

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of American children born to unmarried parents jumped to forty percent in the past few years. Many of their mothers are struggling financially; the most successful are working and going to school and hustling to feed the children, and then falling asleep in the elevator of the community college.

Still, they are in charge. "The family changes over the past four decades have been bad for men and bad for kids, but it is not clear that they are bad for women," says W. Bradford Wilcox, the head of the University of Virginia's National Marriage Project. [He is looking strictly at the economic situation of the opportunities in employment.]

Over the years, researchers have proposed different theories to explain the erosion of marriage in the lower classes: the rise of welfare, or the disappearance of work, and thus of marriageable men. But, Edin thinks that the most compelling theory is that marriage has disappeared because women are setting the terms, and setting them too high for the men around them to reach. "I want that white-picket-fence dream," one woman told Edin, and the men she knew just did not measure up, so she had become her own one-woman mother/father/nurturer/provider.

She is not entirely correct with her assessment that the men were annihilated by the economic situation of a few years ago, although many men were, that is no excuse for men not being men, and not being good husbands. But her emphasis throughout that article was that women are being forced by the men to provide for their families because the men are not living up to what they should be.

What a pathetic view many women have of men; and sadly often it is well deserved. The core problem though is a lack of outgoing concern—a lack of love by men. This is why God tells men to love their wives. A significant number of men are narcissistic, that is, extremely self-centered and self-absorbed, forcing women to pick up the slack.

Many are not willing to give themselves up for anything, except possibly their jobs and their entertainment; which, in reality, is a type of self-love. Men are often more married to their jobs than their wives. But what is needed is: loving self-sacrifice and righteous leadership. Benevolent leadership is a way of loving those under your leadership.

Ungodly husbands in the Bible fail in one or both of these obligations—not loving their wives, or not being the leader in the household—and sometimes even godly men do not perform their role of husband adequately.

One of the greatest failures along these lines is Ahab, who marries Jezebel, a Canaanite, and allows her to bring Baal worship into Israel.

I Kings 16:31-33 And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him [Ahab] to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

Ahab also allowed his wife to destroy the prophets of God, and while he sat pouting because he could not have Naboth's vineyard, Jezebel set out to kill the innocent Naboth to obtain the vineyard for him. Ahab's self-centeredness and poor leadership allowed and caused great suffering.

I Kings 21:15-19 And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead." So it was, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who lives in Samaria. There he is, in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it. You shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: "Have you murdered and also taken possession?"' And you shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours."

So, Ahab willingly allowed his wife to manipulate him, rather than standing up for righteous standards. As God punished Adam for not upholding His law when Eve gave the fruit to him, so also God punished Ahab for being a willing accomplice in Jezebel's evil scheme. Both Adam and Ahab were held responsible for not being righteous, loving leaders of their families. This is a warning to us as well not to fall into that pit of not leading our families righteously.

Love is defined in John's first epistle, as the keeping of God's commandments:

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I John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

So of course, the foundation of leadership in the home, by the husband, should be in the keeping of the Commandments, and teaching them to his family.

Although no godly men in Scripture even approach Ahab's weak and sinful abdication to his wife (and no one had such an evil wife), even the patriarchs often had difficulty being good husbands, especially when they had households with more than one wife.

The story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar is burdened with domestic tension. And the account shows Abraham in a poor light as abdicating his responsibility and failing to deal with the dispute between his wife and her maidservant.

The story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel portrays the patriarch as a less-than-effective husband, showing favoritism for one wife over the other. This produced a great deal more tension in the family, which was already emotionally charged due to the fact that the two wives were sisters. Right from the beginning of that marriage it was not doomed, but it was certainly slated for some trouble.

Contrasted to these failures are the stories of Boaz, the husband of Ruth, and Joseph, the husband of Mary. In addition to examples of godly husbands, the New Testament gives an ideal portrait of marriage under the leadership of Christ, which is really the focus of this sermon. The marriage relationship is set in a new context under Christ, with both husband and wife called upon to enact their marital roles on the model of Christ's relationship to the church.

Women are directed to submit to their husbands, and husbands are commanded to love their wives "as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her". Such love is to take the form of self-sacrifice, a service so complete that men *should* "love their wives as their own bodies. . . . For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it".

In my previous three sermons, we have been looking at what the apostle Paul has to say to wives; now we come to what he has to say to husbands. In Ephesians 5:23-33, Paul assigns a two-fold obligation to husbands: they must be head of their wife, and they must love their wife. Those are easy statements to remember, but not so easy to perform or apply.

In verse 25, Paul turns to the duty of husbands. He does not command the husband to

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submit to his wife, but instead tells the husband that he must give himself up for her. Therefore, husbands are to love their wives in a self-sacrificial manner, following the example of Christ, who "gave Himself up for" the church in loving self-sacrifice.

The biblical picture of a husband laying down his life for his wife is directly opposed to any kind of male tyranny, or oppression, in the family. The husband is bound by love to ensure that his wife finds their marriage a source of rich fulfillment, and joyful service to the Lord. Paul devotes three times more space to the husband's duty (nine verses) than to the wife's (three verses). Obviously, the husband needs three times more instruction and admonishment on proper care and love for his wife.

Ephesians 5:25-33 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Paul's admonition is significant in two main ways; in what it tells us about the duties of husbands, and even more significant, in what it tells us about the relationship of Jesus Christ to the church.

Here, in this essentially practical part of this epistle, he suddenly throws out the most valuable and enlightening statement that he has ever made anywhere, about the nature of the church and her relationship to Jesus Christ. Notice that in covering this matter of husbands, and how they are to behave towards their wives, he also covers the subject of Christ and the church, and he gives to both this inspired emphasis.

The two things, you will notice, are intertwined. Our first responsibility is to arrive at some kind of an organized separation of the subject. Paul moves from one to the other, then back again to the first. He often uses this method; he does not always make a complete statement on the one side and then apply it; he gives a part of his statement,

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applies it, and then another part, and applies that.

In verses 25-27, he tells us what Christ has done for the church, and why He has done it. Then in verse 28-29, he gives us a preliminary deduction from that as to the duty of a husband towards his wife, especially in terms of the union that exists between Christ and the church, and the husband and the wife. Then, in part of verses 29-32, he develops inspirational doctrine of the spiritual union between Christ and the church. Then in verses 31 and 33, he draws his final practical deductions.

For the sake of clarity, I want to approach these scriptures by starting with Paul's general injunction: 'Husbands, love your wives.' That is what he wants to emphasize above everything. In other words, the controlling idea with respect to the husbands is to love. You remember that the controlling idea with respect to the wives was submission—'Wives, submit to your own husbands.' Submission on the part of the wife, love on the part of the husband!

This does not mean, of course, that it is the husband alone that is to love. Someone may remark that 'Paul does not say a word here about the wives loving their husbands.' To say that is to misunderstand Paul's goal altogether, the emphasis is, of course, wives are to love their husbands.

He is not giving us an all-inclusive exposition here on marriage. In his idea of the wife submitting herself—love is implicit. It is important to realize what Paul has determined to do here. He is really concerned about only one basic principle, namely, harmony, peace, and unity, as they are displayed in the married relationship, and in the home.

James 3:18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

We understand, as members of God's church, that peace is required in the home for the fruit of righteousness to be sown. So, there must be peace in the marriage relationship; that is Paul's leading theme. He picks out the element that needs to be emphasized on each of the two sides above every other. What the wife is required to keep her eye on, in maintaining the harmony, is the element of submission; while what the husband has to keep his eye on, in maintaining the harmony, is the element of love.

Paul is picking out the main characteristic, the principal contribution that is to be made by each of the partners in this wonderful relationship which can demonstrate the glory of the Christian life so clearly. Therefore, the principle addressed to husbands is: 'Love

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your wives.' This is very important, especially in connection with the husband as head of the wife. It safeguards and balances the previous principle of submission, and it is important that we look at it in that way. Paul emphasized that 'the husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.'

We saw that the husband is in the position of leadership, that he is the leader of the wife. That is the teaching of the Bible, and Paul emphasized it. But immediately he adds this: 'Husbands, love your wives', as if to say, 'You are the head, you are the leader, you are the lord in this relationship; but because you love your wives the leadership will never become a tyranny, and though you are "lord" you will never become a tyrant.' So the love that is required by the husband helps to balance the submission that the wife gives to the husband, in that the husband does not take advantage of his power as the wife submits.

That is the connection between the two principles.

This is something that is found very generally in the teaching of the New Testament. Let me give you an example. In many ways the best comment on this matter is found in:

II Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound [disciplined] mind.

There you have the same thing again. 'God has not given us a spirit of fear.' Well, what has He given? It is 'a spirit of power;' but in case a man thinks that this is something tyrannical he adds, 'and love.' It is the power of love. It is not raw power, and it is not the power of an insecure dictator, or a little tyrant. It is not the idea of a man who claims for himself certain rights, and tramples on his wife's feelings and so on, and sits in the home as a dictator. Power must be tempered by love, whether in the home, or the leadership of a city, state, or country.

We must always maintain a balance. No husband is entitled to say that he is the head of the wife unless he loves his wife. He is not carrying out the scriptural injunction unless he does so. These things go together, and they are inseparable in one sense.

In other words, it is a manifestation of the Spirit, and God not only gives power through and by His Holy Spirit, but gives love and also discipline. So as the husband exercises his privilege as the head of the wife, and the head of the family, he does so in this way.

The husband is always to be controlled by this love, and he is to be controlled by

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discipline. He must discipline himself. This is what most men are not doing in this society today. There may be the tendency to dictate, but he must not do so. Power is tempered by love, love is produced by a sound mind; and this requires discipline. All that is implicit here in this great word "*love*."

So the reign of the husband is to be a reign and rule of love; it is a leadership of love. It is not the idea of a dictator. No, it is the power of love—it is the discipline of the spirit guarding this power and authority and dignity that are given to the husband. That is the fundamental and the controlling idea in the whole of this matter—'*Husbands, love your wives*.'

Now let us consider the character or the nature of that love. There are two things that stand out in a glaring manner in the world today—the abuse of the idea of power, and the still greater abuse of the idea of love.

The world has never talked so much about love as it does today. But, I wonder whether there has ever been a time when there has been less love. These great terms have become so completely debased that most people have no idea as to the meaning of the word 'love.' '*Husbands love your wives*.' What is love? Thankfully for us, the apostle Paul tells us; and he does so in two ways. '*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church*.' There are two definitions there.

The first is in the word 'love' itself. The very word Paul used here for '*love*' is very eloquent in its teaching and its meaning. In the Greek language, as used in the days of the apostle Paul, there were three words that can be translated by the English word 'love.' It is very important for us to be clear about this, and differentiate between them; because much of the loose thinking today in this world is due to the failure to appreciate this.

One of the three, which does not occur in the New Testament, is the word '*eros*,' which describes a love that belongs entirely to the flesh. The adjective '*erotic*,' as commonly used today, reminds us of the content of the word. Of course, it is a kind of love according to the world's standards and definition. But it is a love of the flesh, it is desire, it is something carnal; and the characteristic of that kind of love is that it is selfish.

That kind of love is essentially selfish; it is born of desire. It wants something, and it is mainly concerned about what it can get. That is its level. It is, in a sense, the carnal part in man. And that is what generally passes as "love" in the world today. The world glories in its "spectacular" immoral romances, and falsely tells us how wonderful they are. We see that constantly in television, movies, in the newspaper, and the magazines.

Notice, that the world says nothing about the fact that the man has been unfaithful to his wife and vice versa, and that little children are going to suffer. The only thing people in this society are concerned about is that 'breathtaking romance' has entered the life of the man and the woman. They think it is love and it must be good. That they are both guilty of breaking their vows and desecrating marriage is not mentioned; what is publicized is this spectacular "love match," this wonderful romance! You find that kind of thing in the media every day. It is nothing but this erotic, selfish, fleshly, lustful desire. But I am reminding you that 'eros' is certainly regarded as "love" by the world today.

As for the two words translated 'love' in the New Testament one of them, 'phileo,' really means 'to be fond of.' It comes in as a root in such words as: 'philanthropic' and 'Philadelphia.' The classic illustration of its use is found in John 21, in the incident that tells how Peter and the others had gone fishing at night and, coming back, had suddenly seen Christ on the seashore. Christ cooked a breakfast for them, and began to speak to them.

John 21:15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love [agapas] Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love [phileo] You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

Now the interesting point there is that when Peter says, "You know that I love You", the word he used was 'You know that I am fond of You.' Jesus Christ, using the third word (agape), asks him if he really loves Him, but Peter replies, 'You know that I am fond of You.'

John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love [agapas] Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love [phileo] You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

Peter again states that he is fond of Christ. Then we come to verse 17:

John 21:17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love [phileo] Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love [phileo] Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love [phileo] You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

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Now, here in verse 17, Christ does a very interesting thing; He does not use the word *agapas* that He had been using before; He now uses the word '*phileo*' that Peter had been using. Christ has lowered the conception, 'Are you really fond of Me?'

Peter was grieved that Christ seemed to doubt whether he was even fond of Him; so in the light of this failure he could only trust himself to Christ's knowledge and say, 'You know that I am fond of You.' There was a difference there in the words that they were using, and Christ wanted to know from Peter.

But let us keep these things in mind. The word translated '*love*' in Scripture may at times mean 'being fond of.' In Ephesians 5:25, is Paul telling husbands, 'Husbands, be fond of your wives'? Absolutely not! The word Paul uses is '*agapao*,' the same word that Christ uses in John 21:15, 16, where He asked Peter, 'Do you love Me?'

This other New Testament word, *agapao*, rises to a much greater height. It is the word that is always used in the Bible to express God's love to us—'*God so loved the world.*' This is the word that is used in Ephesians 5:25 that we are analyzing. 'Husbands, love your wives;' in that sense, husbands are commanded to love their wives as God loves. There is nothing higher than this.

This type of love is willful and purposeful, and is an essential inherent responsibility of all Christians, but husbands are especially commanded to have this. The husband's '*agape*' love toward his wife is first toward God, because he is fulfilling his duty of submission to God's commandments to keep the first and second greatest commandments,

Matthew 22:37-39 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

The characteristic of this '*agape*' kind of love is that it is essentially righteousness and moral; whereas, '*phileo*' (the fond of kind of love) is essentially emotional. When the husband's God-given '*agape*' love is directed toward his wife, it is a self-sacrificing love. Or to put it another way, take the list describing the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, and notice the position of the word '*love.*'

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love [agape], joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

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Against such there is no law.

So the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of righteousness, which is to be produced in the family, are all these things, but it takes love from the husband to set a peaceful existence for his family.

The apostle Paul is contrasting the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, and he says, 'The fruit of the Spirit is love'—not erotic feeling, not merely being fond of, it is the love that resembles God's love—love, joy, peace, and so on.

You see how it all links up so perfectly with Ephesians 5:

Ephesians 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.

Paul's whole context here is not just about marriage, but it is about producing the fruit of the Spirit, and being filled with it. If you are 'filled with the Spirit' you will be producing the fruit of the Spirit, and the most important fruit of all is 'love.' Paul is addressing people who are filled with the Spirit, because only they can show this love. It is useless to tell a husband who is not a Christian to love (agape) his wife because he is incapable of it; he cannot love with this kind of love, because this kind of love is a fruit of the Spirit.

Christians should manifest this kind of love because they are filled with the Spirit. The highest level of love that an *unconverted* husband can reach is to be fond of (phileo) his wife.

So one of the ways that shows that we are filled with the Spirit is not so much that we go into ecstasies and manifest certain phenomena; but it is the way we behave towards life when we are home. It is this kind of love that is 'a fruit of the Spirit.'

The specific word Paul selected leads us immediately to the precise idea that he is anxious to convey. Let us get this whole matter of marriage, and the marriage relationship, into focus.

Let me qualify something: I am not saying that the first element 'eros'—that belongs to the flesh—should not come in at all. Humans have a natural desire that is not necessarily a sin. There have been some professing Christian churches that have taught that there is something wrong with sex and desire. The Roman Catholic teaching

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concerning celibacy is ultimately based on that misconception, and it is an utter failure. The Christian is still human, still of the natural order. Regarding sex as evil is not a Christian teaching.

That element of 'eros' is to come in, it is included. God made man human. God has given us these gifts, sex included, and there is nothing wrong with the erotic element in and of itself; and it should be present!

Because of this wrong view of sex, and of that which is natural, some people have drawn the conclusion that any Christian man can marry any Christian woman. They say that the only thing that matters and counts is that we are Christians. They do away with the natural element. But the Bible does not do this. Though we are Christians, it is right that we feel more attracted to one than to another.

The natural comes in, and we must not totally exclude it. We must never take up the position that any one of us could quite rightly marry any other. You could live together legally, but that would be to exclude this natural element. The Scriptures do not do away with the natural. They do not do away with the way in which God has created us. However, under certain rare and special circumstances it may advise people to refrain.

I Corinthians 7:1-6 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.

Some Corinthian Christians appear to have adopted the view that sexual relations of any kind, even within marriage, should be avoided. Paul tries to carefully refute this view throughout chapter 7.

God designed marriage as the place for the expression of human sexuality. Sex within marriage has both relational and spiritual benefits.

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In Ephesians 5:28-31, Paul reiterates a husband's calling to self-sacrificial love for his wife by comparing this love to regard for one's own body (both their own bodies), himself, and his own flesh, and then to Christ's love for His body. The "body" for which Christ sacrificed Himself was not His own person, but the "body" which is the church.

Ephesians 5:28-31 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

The command for a husband to love his wife as he loves "his own flesh" originates in the initial creation of the first husband and wife, when God first joined the husband and the wife together to "become one flesh." Paul's quotation in verse 31 is from Genesis 2:24, speaking of marriage before there was any sin in the world.

Unity with Christ is incompatible with all sin, but especially with sexual sin. Because sexual union has a spiritual component, sexual activity outside marriage is a unique sin both against Christ and one's own body. Within marriage, sexual union is not only allowed, but has positive spiritual significance.

I Corinthians 6:15-20 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

God's Spirit lives within each Christian; making each Christian's body a temple just as the church, unitedly conceived, is also a temple where God's Spirit dwells. We are not our own. As with other gifts from God, we are to exercise responsible stewardship over our bodies.

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Sex within marriage has the practical benefit of reducing the temptation to engage in sexual sin.

I Corinthians 7:8-9 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

The Corinthians were living in a time of persecution and distress; and the apostle Paul advised them not to be weighed down with the cares and anxieties that come from having a family during such a time of terror. However, he added the advice that it is better to marry, even with all the inconveniences present in married life in a time of anxiety in the church, than to be the prey of raging and consuming desires.

Now let us get back to the false belief—the ridiculous idea—that a single Christian man should be able to marry any single Christian woman, and vice versa. God has designed human beings to have an interest, even a desire, for a narrow range of people. God has so created us that one feels an attraction to one person more than another person; and it is mutual.

The apostle Paul assumes that this man and this woman, because they were attracted to each other, because (to use a modern vernacular) they 'fell in love,' are married. Christians should behave in that way similar to everybody else. This is not something mechanical.

Let me emphasize that that also is to come into Christian marriage. There are certain natural affinities, and we ignore them at our own risk. It has happened that two people have imagined that because they are Christians nothing else matters, and they get married on that basis. I have personally seen that happen in God's church.

But it is very important in the married state that the two persons be fond of each other. If they are not fond of each other, and have married on the basis of the physical only, the excitement will soon go away, and that has no permanence in it. On the other hand, one of the things that has the greater potential for permanence is that the two are fond of each other. So you have the eros which is the desire, and you have the phileo which is being fond of the person.

There are certain things that are not measurable in this married state. It is important that people who are married have the same affinities, the same interests, and are attracted by the same things. No matter how much they love each other, if there are fundamental

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differences in this respect, it will lead to trouble. This is a simple example: if your husband likes country music and you hate it then you are going to be somewhat irritated at times. This is just a minor thing, but it is a small example of the type of situation that comes up and the problems can build and be greater.

It is important that this second element, the word 'phileo' that Peter kept using, 'I am fond of You,' should play its part. The apostle Paul is assuming both considerations, 'eros' and 'phileo.'

It is probable that some of the Christians had married while they were pagans, and that the marriage included both 'eros' and 'phileo'. So Paul tells them that this is where Christianity comes in. Now, because you are Christians, the further element 'love' comes in; and it lifts up the other two, it sanctifies them—it gives an excellence to them—it gives a glory to them.

That is the difference that Christ makes to marriage. It is only the Christian who is able to rise to this level. There can be happy and successful marriages without this; they do still happen in the world. There are happy marriages on the natural human level, and they are based on the first two words that I have been using: 'eros' and 'phileo,' desire and fondness. If you get the first element 'eros', plus this 'phileo' for each other, and a certain temperament, they can produce very happy and successful worldly marriages. But it will never rise to this higher level of Godly love.

This level of 'agape'—this level of love—is the point to which we are expected to rise as Christians. Over and above what is possible for the natural human, there comes in this true love, the love that is of God. The apostle John says this:

I John 4:7-11 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

What greater responsibility and challenge has a husband than to try to emulate this love? This love that is of God and from God! The apostle Paul writes in Romans 13:10, 'Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.' It is the keeping of the law of God; it is the applying of it in everyday life, especially in home life

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and in the marriage.

Paul elaborates on this love in I Corinthians 13:

I Corinthians 13:1-3 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

The word 'nothing' there is repeated twice, which is for emphasis and very important to take note of.

I Corinthians 13:4 Love suffers long and is kind. . . .

As we go through this, husbands please apply this to your marriage, and look at it as directly applying to your marriage, and being requirements that all husbands are to fulfill, as well as all Christians.

I Corinthians 13:4-8, 13 love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. . . . And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

It is clear that Paul, in choosing his word 'love,' has told us a great deal. It is therefore the duty of every husband who hears or reads this exhortation to examine himself in the light of this word: 'agape'—love from God, through His Holy Spirit.

Are the three elements: eros, philo, and agape, present in your marriage?

To clarify this further, the apostle Paul proceeds to give us an illustration in the second point that he makes:

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Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

The very mention of the name of Christ leads Paul immediately to elaborate the statement. To just say, 'just as Christ loved the church' is a profound statement in and of itself, but Paul does not stop there, he goes further and elaborates with, 'and gave Himself for her.'

Ephesians 5:26-27 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

He says all that to help the husband to love his wife—as he *should* love his wife. Why does he elaborate the matter in this way?

First, he wants every one of us to know Christ's great love for us. He wants us to realize the truth about Christ and ourselves, and our relationship to Him.

Why is he so concerned about this? Because it is only as we realize the truth about the relationship of Christ to the church, that we really function as Christian husbands should function. So that this will be clear he ends by saying in Ephesians 5:32:

Ephesians 5:32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

But why is he speaking concerning Christ and the church? Why has he led us into that mystery?

This is so that husbands might know how to love their wives. But if we want to live as Christian husbands, we have to study and follow God's instructions; we have to apply our minds, we have to think, we have to try to understand; we have to come to grips with it, and we have to discipline our minds.

It is here for us, and if we turn our backs on this we are rejecting something God is giving us, and we are being obstinate—stubborn to the point of sinning against God. Never put practice before and against doctrine, because you cannot properly practice

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without true doctrine.

Paul takes the trouble to elaborate this wonderful doctrine about the relationship of Christ and the church, not simply for the sake of stating it, important as it is, but in order that you and I at home (and at all times) may love our wives as we should love them, 'just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.'

So we can now look at the problem in the following way. The principle that is to control our practice is that the relationship between husband and wife is the same in essence as the relationship between Christ and the church. How, then, do we learn how to apply it? We have to start by studying the relationship between Christ and the church, and then we can look at the relationship between husband and wife. That is what Paul is doing.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church.

This said, Paul tells us exactly how Christ has loved the church. Then, he says, Go and do the same; that is our imperative and our duty as Christian husbands. That is the first principle. We start then by considering the relationship of Christ and the church. Here is something that concerns all, not only husbands, but all people. What we are told about the relationship of Christ to the church is true of every single one of us.

Christ is the husband of the church, and in a sense, Christ is the husband of every single member of God's church.

Romans 7:4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

Christ is the Husband of the church; the church is the Bride of Christ. Every one of us can in that sense look at Jesus Christ as our husband, and collectively we do so as members of God's church.

The first thing Paul tells us is about the attitude of Jesus Christ to the church, and of how He looks at her. Here is instruction for husbands: What is your attitude toward your wife? Have you realized that these things are true about you as members of God's church? Look at the characteristics of Jesus Christ's attitude towards His bride, the

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church.

He truly loves her; Paul tells us 'Christ also loved the church.' What an eloquent expression! He loves her in spite of her shortcomings; He loves her in spite of her deficiencies.

Notice what He has to do for her. She needs to be washed, she needs to be cleansed. He saw her unkempt and blemished; but He loves her. He loves us, not because of anything in us; He loved us in spite of what was in us, 'while we were still sinners.'

Romans 5:6-8 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Christ loves the church, not because she is now glorious and beautiful, but because she has the potential to be like that, and He can make her that way. What does this say to husbands?

A husband comes up against deficiencies, difficulties, things he feels he can criticize in his wife, but he is to love her 'as Christ loved the church.' That is the kind of love he must show. Husbands, can you overlook your wife's deficiencies? That is the first part of the principle that is found in Ephesians 5:25, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church.'

Husbands, are you willing to give your life for your wife? That is what is required, or may be required some day.

The second principle that is found in Ephesians 5:25 is this: 'He gave Himself for her.'

Ephesians 5:25-26 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

He was not only ready to sacrifice Himself for her; He actually did sacrifice Himself for her. That is Christ's love for and His commitment to the church. He could only save her by giving His life for her. That is a main characteristic of love—self-sacrifice.

Then take notice of His great concern for her, and for her well-being. He is looking at her. He is concerned about her. He sees the possibilities in her, so to speak. He desires her to be perfect. That is why Paul goes on to say in Ephesians 5:27, "that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish,"

We see here His interest in her, His love for her, and His pride in her. Those are the characteristics of Christ's love to the church—this great desire for her to be perfect. And He is not going to be satisfied until she is perfect. You can only take analogies so far, and I am not saying that husbands should beat their wives into perfection, but as husbands, we certainly are required to help our wives move on to perfection, along with God, and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Christ wants to be able to present her to Himself a glorious church, 'not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.' He wants her to be perfect, beyond criticism. He wants her to be admired everywhere. So we are told that Christ has done all this to glorify God!

Ephesians 3:10-11 To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is God's intention that we, as God's church—as the bride of Christ—glorify God by showing His manifold wisdom in the way that we carry on in our own lives, according to the eternal purpose, and our marriages can help us to arrive at this very important purpose.

It is this righteous pride of the bridegroom in His wife; he is proud of her beauty, proud of her appearance, proud of all that is true of her; and He wants to show her to His family and to all His creation to glorify God because she is God's family. That is the kind of relationship that exists between Jesus Christ and His church. I am extracting the principle out of the details first, because they give us an understanding of this wonderful spiritual relationship.

And so the picture is of Christ rejoicing in the relationship, happy in it, triumphant in it, and glorying in it. There is nothing that He will not do for His bride, the church. We have to start with this picture of Christ and the church, so that we can see how He looks on her, and what He does for her, and what He has in view for her—His ultimate objective. And because of all this, there is the extraordinary concept of the spiritual relationship,

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the unity, the idea that they are one flesh, and that she is His body. 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her.'

So that is the second part of the principle that is found in Ephesians 5:25, He 'gave Himself for her.' There, then, is the great principle, Christ loving the church and giving Himself for her.

The loving relationship between Christ and the church is what should exist between husband and wife. So we must start with that. Look at the great doctrine of God's church: Whether a person is married or unmarried, this is true of all of us because we are in the church.

How wonderful to realize that we are in this relationship with Christ! That is how He looks at us; that is His attitude toward us. The principle is this; this love, this God-originating (agape) love, is altogether above the erotic and philanthropic fondness that is the highest level that the world can know.

The great characteristic of this love (and this is where it is essentially different from the others) is that this is not governed by the desire to get, but by the desire to give. 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.' How did He love? He gave.

There is nothing inherently wrong with the other types of love, but even when you have them at their best they are generally motivated by self-centeredness, they are mostly thinking of themselves. But the characteristic of this other love is that it does not think of itself.

Christ gave Himself; He died for her ('even unto death.') Sacrifice is the essence of this love. This love is a love that *gives*; it is not always considering what it is going to get, but what it may give for the benefit of the other. Husbands, love your wives like that, just as Christ loved the church.

Having looked in general at Christ's attitude towards the church, we can next proceed to show how that attitude manifests its ultimate objective, and finally to the spiritual relationship and union.

Thank God that in considering marriage, which appears on the surface to the average person to be such an ordinary human institution, we discover if we are Christians, that we have to consider it in such a way that it brings us into the very center of the mysteries of God in Christ, as seen in and through God's church.

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Husbands, may God grant us the humility and meekness, but most importantly the love, which must motivate us to give our lives for our lovely best friends—our wives!