

The Perfect Husband

Christ's Example for Us

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In Charlotte over the last few weeks, the top local news story has been a family problem. It is the case of Jack and Cathy Stratton. Most of you probably have not heard about this case, unless you have read my CGG Weekly column from a week ago.

To give you a few of the details—over two years ago, the Mecklenburg Department of Social Services descended upon the Stratton house, and took their ten children from them.

You might say, "Wow! Ten children!" They sighted that the Strattons were not able to provide for the family—they were neglecting their children. And they intimated after all that came out in the court, that there was some physical, and possible sexual abuse going on.

Like I said, nearly two years have passed. Mrs. Stratton has been able to receive custody of only one of their children. That was their oldest son, Spencer, but only because he turned 18. He had aged out of the DSS system.

What's so frightening about this is that the Stratton family is what was once called, "The Backbone of Society." They would have been called in times past, "Productive Citizens." They would have been praised, and held up as a model of the American family. Maybe not the ten children, but their family would have been held in high esteem for what they tried to do.

Let me explain. They are a practicing Christian family—Protestant. They are trying as best they know how to practice Christian values. They are fairly conservative in their views. You can see this by what they believe.

They believe in the mother staying at home to rear and care for the children. They believe that it is the parents' job to teach their children, and so they home-school. They reject vaccinations because it is God's desire to heal. They refuse most forms of state welfare, because they believe I Timothy 5:8 that it is the husband's job to provide for the family. If he does not, he's worse than an unbeliever.

In effect, they are a lot like you and me. They try to abide by the things we know are right. And, they are a lot like you and me in their relationship to the

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government—federal, state, and local—which has, in many ways, turned against such formerly well esteemed members of the community.

Yesterday, in the last despicable act in this entire charade thus far, Jack Stratton was jailed for 30 days for contempt of court. Because, he dared to go on the radio to talk about his case. The judge had issued a gag order. From what I understand, the judge found him in contempt, even though the only things talked about were already official public record.

She, the judge, squashed him and put him in jail to teach him and those of us out here, a lesson, "You don't go flaunting your freedoms. I've got power to put you in jail."

Nothing else, over the past year or two, has focused my attention on the family, and the things happening to the family more. It made me think about my responsibilities as husband and father to provide for my family. Things that I need to do. And, even though I have what is now considered a fairly large family—four children—I only have half of Jack Stratton has to provide for. I have six people, he has 12!

It has really made me take a long look at what it is to be a husband and a father. That's what I'd like to talk about today.

A member asked me during the Feast this year, to speak about husbands. And so, I'm going to be speaking about husbands today. Just taking that **one**, narrow aspect of family life. But, I really don't want to talk about husbands! I want to talk about Perfect Husbands!

Now, I'm sure Jack Stratton is no perfect husband. And, I am in that category too. I'm no perfect husband, but we do have an example of One. And, it is this subject that I want to speak about today.

We're going to start in Deuteronomy 30 to lay some groundwork on this subject. The first few verses we're going to turn to are principles that set up this analogy of the perfect husband.

Normally when we come to Deuteronomy 30, we go to verses 19, mostly focusing on, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore, chose life that both you and your descendants will live!"

But, I would like to focus on another phrase a bit further down in verse 20:

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Deuteronomy 30:20 "that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

"He is your life" is what I would like to highlight.

We know this. But, we can take this several ways. And, probably while you were going through there, thinking about what this might mean, maybe you came up with one or two of these different ways of looking at this.

We could say, 1) He is the reason we have life, because He is the Lifegiver, and all life comes from Him. There would be no life without Him. He was the One who breathed the breath of life into us as human beings through Adam. But, we could also say, "He has done this for all animal life!" He is the One who has provided life unto all.

Another way to look at it is: 2) He is the center of our lives. He is the focus of our lives. We are to think of everything that happens in life, as revolving around Him and His way.

Another way to look at it is also, 3) He is the aim of our lives—the goal of our lives.

So, in a way, this is like a past, present, and future way to view this, "He is our Life." He gives us life, He is the focus, or center, of our life, and He is also the goal of our life. He is the source, the focus, and the goal.

In every way, we could say very plainly, and truthfully, "He is our life."

And then, there is a New Testament way of looking at this, 4) He lives His life in us!

So, very quickly, we came up with four different ways to look at this. And all of them are true.

Let's read John 14, and narrow this down a bit. This is what He told his disciples on the night in which He was arrested.

John 14:19-23 A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. "At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves

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Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

This is, maybe, the clearest section (well, at least it is to me) in all of the bible that says basically, that God is coming to live His life in us. Let's go to chapter 17, and verse 20, and see that this comes down to us.

John 17:20-24 I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; [That's you and me!] that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Jesus says that He and the Father abide with—dwell in—us. And this makes us one with them. As long as we are living in unity with their purpose, and according to their way of life, we are one with God.

So, how do we live God's way? How do we remain in this unity with them?

Well, first of all, we do it by learning it. We learn it from God's Word, and then we follow the instruction that is found in I John 2:5-6:

I John 2:5-6 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. [It says that we know that we are in Him here, because we're keeping His word, and we're seeing His love perfected in us.] He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

We have one word in the English language that will boil this all down into a very easily understood principle. The word is, "imitation."

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First we learn it through His words, and then we imitate Him. And by doing that, even if it is only by rote for a while, in the most simplistic manner that we can, just like a baby imitates his mother or father, pretty soon it becomes ingrained in us. That's the way we always do things because that is the way.

Our God has done it. And so we will do it like our God does. That's the relationship between a child and his parents, and is similar to our relationship to God.

As a matter of fact, a child thinks of God, in many ways, as his parents have related with him. And so, it is awfully important for us as parents to be as godly as possible so we set up the next generation with proper understanding in the way that God acts, because they're first going to learn it from us. And we go through this same process with our God, whom we call "The Father."

We have never seen the Father, except as it says there in John 14, where Jesus Christ says, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." So, it doesn't exactly correspond, but we could say that Jesus Christ our Elder Brother is the surrogate of the Father in this particular thing.

We have seen the Son. We see Him in the pages of our bible, and we can then imitate Him. Mimic Him even! So, we can get these bits of godly character ingrained in us.

And of course, we cannot leave out the fact that God Himself will help us in doing this. It is not just our imitating what He does, it is also Him giving to us the abilities, and understanding, strength, and motivations to do these things.

So, God gives us instructions as if from a textbook, which we study (hopefully very assiduously) to learn all that is in there, and then we go out and copy that perfect example that He's provided for us in the life of Jesus Christ.

And by doing so, these things become ingrained, and eventually they become natural to us. We could do them without really thinking about them, because they are the way. Our way.

OK. Let's go now to I Peter 2, and I want to pick out just a principle here. Peter's main subject toward the end of this particular chapter is suffering. But, I want to pick this one verse out, verse 21.

I Peter 2:21 For to this you were called [meaning, this is what we are supposed to be doing—it is for this reason God selected you out of all the

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billions on the earth], because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

Now, let's just take out that middle section, and leave: "For to this you were called...that you should follow His steps."

That's the reason you are in this particular relationship with Him. That's the reason why God has issued to you personally an invitation to His way of life, and to His kingdom. It is so we could follow His steps throughout our own lives. We can do this because He lives in us.

Now, don't throw away or discard this idea of Christ's suffering. This will come back later. We won't come back here to I Peter 2, but the example that Jesus Christ set for us has much to do with suffering. So, don't let that get too far away from your mind.

Jesus Christ's entire earthly life, besides the other spiritual purposes for which He became a man, was to provide for us a pattern to follow.

You see, before He came, there was only a vague concept of God that had been revealed through law and through just a few personal contacts with members of the nation of Israel. And, it was vague.

In fact, it was so vague that the Jews in the first century still did not understand that there was a Father. They had all their contact with the Son, but they didn't consider Him the Son. They just considered Him God. They had no idea of the true nature of God. They knew from Deuteronomy that God is one. Had they looked into the scripture and been able to put it all together, they could have understood that. "The LOORD said unto my Lord..." and, that sort of thing. There was another being who was over the God of the Old Testament. But, very few came to understand this.

And so, they could maybe understand a little bit about how God acts because of His interrelation with them, and the way He worked with the nation of Israel. But, it was not as clear as it could have been. They "saw through a glass darkly"—even darker than the way we see it—and they didn't have the example, yet, of His Son. And, we have four different angles on it—the gospel accounts. Plus, all the commentary, you might say, by the Apostle Paul, and other later writers on that life, and the things that He taught.

And then, the gospels in the New Testament allow us to bring out those details from the Old Testament to give us an understanding of how it is that God interrelated with Israel,

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just as God in the flesh interrelated with people, and thus how He will relate to us.

For without the revelation that was found in the New Testament, we would be just as blind as the Jews were, in many respects. We wouldn't have that personal, human example to draw from.

OK. Our topic is husbands. Jesus never married [as a man on this earth]. How can He, then, be an example to us—a pattern—as a husband, if he never married?

Well, the answer, as you probably already figured out, is that we're not bound to the confines of His earthly life. All the acts of God, for all time, are fair game. Because, all of His acts are righteous. They always have been, and they always will be. And so, we have Jesus Christ acting as Yahweh in the Old Testament—the Lord.

And, He is also the head of the Church today. He is still giving an example of how He acts as Husband, or in this case, as Bridegroom—Affianced Husband. So we have that example as well.

So, His actions, in respect to the New Testament era, as He worked with the Church from the time of Pentecost AD 31 onward, are also fair game for us.

There is a great deal—eternity—of information about God, and how He acts as a Husband. So, He has not left us without an example in this one area.

Let's read Isaiah 54, beginning in verse 1, please.

This is an interesting section of scripture. There is a progression of thought and action that runs at least from chapter 52 all the way up through chapter 56. These chapters are not disconnected. You can see a natural progression of thought from a New Testament standpoint. Let's remember the "Suffering Servant," from the previous chapter [Isaiah 53], where Christ has given Himself for us, and suffered all these terrible things—bruised and beaten, and killed for our redemption. The very next verse is...

Isaiah 54:1 "Sing, O barren, You who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, You who have not labored with child!...

Now the whole of chapter 53 was woe, and doom, and almost despondency from the standpoint of our God going through this terrible pain and death. Although there is the glimmer of hope there, because He was doing this for us, chapter 54 just steps out with

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praise, and, a great deal of enthusiasm and hope! It starts with, "Sing!" And, when you sing, in a context like this, you're singing praises to God. You are happy about something. What are you happy about? We are happy because widow-hood has been lifted.

Continuing from where we left off:

Isaiah 54:1 For more are the children of the desolate Than the children of the married woman," says the LOORD.

Let's read verse 4:

Isaiah 54:4-6 "Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; Neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; For you will forget the shame of your youth, And will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. For your Maker is your husband, The LOORD of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth. For the LOORD has called you Like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, Like a youthful wife when you were refused," Says your God.

And then He goes on and says that He has redeemed them, and given them mercy. Then He would add to them all these things, and would be a perfect Husband for them, giving them everything that they would need.

So, here we have the idea in the Old Testament that Yahweh—the Lord of Hosts—the One who became Jesus Christ—is the Husband of those He will redeem.

Now, obviously the context here is of Israel. But, knowing what we know, that the Church is the Israel of God [Galatians 6:16], it moves to a higher plane. Once God has done this [what is described in chapter 53 of Isaiah], then what happens in chapter 54 becomes possible.

And so, He gives the promise here that our Creator, the One who made us, the Son who came down to suffer for us, and to leave us an example, is our Husband, also. It goes on to say all the things that He will do as a Husband. And then—in chapter 55—there is an invitation to eternal life [to Israel]. In chapter 56, the invitation extends beyond Israel to the Gentiles.

His husband-hood goes farther than just Israel, even in this context. It encompasses all the nations. So, obviously the Church is thought of because, eventually, Jesus Christ will be the husband of all.

Now, some might get technical and say that it is only those in the first resurrection, but I don't want to debate that right now.

The idea here is that because He has redeemed us, He is coming into a marriage covenant with us. (I know some have thought that, so I thought I'd mention it.) I think it is better thought of as all encompassing, so as not to leave anyone out. Obviously, the first resurrection is the better resurrection, and He makes the Marriage Supper with those who come up then, so there is support for that. But, for now, let's keep it general.

All who are redeemed will have a close and abiding relationship with Him.

All of these things that Isaiah goes on to reveal through the remainder of Isaiah 54 (I don't want to read them now for lack of time): He clothes them; gives them gifts; protects them; keeps them from oppression; keeps them from any terror; fights for them; and many other things. Basically, it states that He provides like any husband would for his wife, in any normal setting. Of course, we're not talking about a normal person here.

There are spiritual things that are woven in and out of this, but I don't want to get into all that, right now. We'll get to the more specific things a little later.

Let's go to Ezekiel 16, and we'll see another view of this, because God shows in Ezekiel His loving care for Israel, and for Jerusalem in particular. I want you to see what He says he has done. This is what Jesus—the Lord of the Old Testament—did for His physical people.

Ezekiel 16:6 And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!...'

By the way, connect verse 6 with Deuteronomy 30:19-20 where He says to choose Life so that you and your progeny may live. There is only true life in Him.

Ezekiel 16:7-14 I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. [Now, stick those ideas, particularly "matured" into the back of your mind. It will come up again later.] Your

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breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare. When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord GOOD. [Very clearly a marriage relationship is being spoken of here.] Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. [Remember this as well.] I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. [These are ancient Middle-Eastern customs.] Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you," says the Lord GOOD.

Now again, I don't want to dwell too long on these things. They were primarily physical actions that any man would/should do for his wife. He entered into this relationship and did His best to clothe her and feed her, and protect her, and make her an object of beauty. Basically anything He could do to promote her, to make her grow, and mature. So that she would be the "Talk of the Town" for her wonderfulness. This is what God did for Israel. He did His best to make her into an object of beauty. "Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty."

So, He bettered her condition. He clothed, and adorned her; He provided her sustenance, and He protected her.

Of course, you can't go very far in the Old Testament or anywhere in the bible, without spiritual intimations of other things happening here as well, and we saw some of those in verses 8 and 9.

Now, to continue, let's go to Hosea 2. It would be helpful to read the whole chapter. We will get to the portion regarding the relationship between God and Israel. Here in verse 2 is the sad part of the saga.

Hosea 2:2 Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; For she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her

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sight, And her adulteries from between her breasts;...

Hosea 2:7-9 She will chase her lovers, But not overtake them; Yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, For then it was better for me than now.' For she did not know That I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, And multiplied her silver and gold—Which they prepared for Baal. Therefore I will return and take away My grain in its time And My new wine in its season, And will take back My wool and My linen, Given to cover her nakedness.

We see the relationship falling apart. She has committed adultery. She has been unfaithful. Of course, in this particular place, God is speaking about idolatry, primarily, and going against His law. And so, He took back what He had given to her. All the blessings He bestowed upon the nation, He took back.

Hosea 2:13-16 I will punish her For the days of the Baals to which she burned incense. She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, And went after her lovers; But Me she forgot," says the LOORD. Therefore, behold, I will allure her, Will bring her into the wilderness, And speak comfort to her. I will give her her vineyards from there, And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; She shall sing there, As in the days of her youth, As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. And it shall be, in that day," Says the LOORD, "That you will call Me 'My Husband,' And no longer call Me 'My Master,'

These titles here in Hebrew are "Ishi" for My Husband, and "Baali" for My Master. He's telling us in this language, that they would have a proper respect for Him, as their husband, and not confuse Him with the Baals.

Hosea 2:17-22 For I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, And they shall be remembered by their name no more. In that day I will make a covenant for them With the beasts of the field, With the birds of the air, And with the creeping things of the ground. Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth, To make them lie down safely. I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, And you shall know the LOORD. It shall come to pass in that day That I will answer," says the LOORD; "I will answer the heavens, And they shall answer the earth. The earth shall answer With grain, With new wine, And with oil; They shall

answer Jezreel.

Jezreel means, "*God will Sow*"—meaning basically, "*God will bless*." He shows here that He will do that.

We see here that God originally matured her, gave her all these things, and then she rebelled—did all these idolatries—and He divorced her. Then, He shows in the time to come—"In that Day"—He will call Israel back to Himself, and the process will begin all over again. He will woo her again, just like He did at the beginning, and He will give her these blessings one more time. And this time, it will work. There will be a big difference then—the presence of God's Spirit, and the ability to be converted. The problem with them under the first covenant, will no longer be there, and this will be, then, an eternal covenant of marriage. Then they will live with Him in righteousness and justice, and loving kindness, and mercy and faithfulness, as He says there in verses 19 and 20.

So, we see how God has gone through so much with Israel, and we see how He reacted. We see here that He will not endure sin for very long. He will not put up with it, and He will punish. He will put her away.

We see Him having to face a great many trials—the same trials—that a normal husband and wife would have during the course of a marriage. You could say that God, in His relationship with Israel in this case, went through the worst of trials as an example to us. We can learn from that.

Let's take this into a New Testament realm.

II Corinthians 11:2 ...For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

From now on, members of the Church of God are betrothed to Christ. What he means here is that he has brought them into the Church. God called them, of course. He used the instrument of Paul in their conversion. And Paul is saying that he is like the "best man" who has gone and actually performed the betrothal between Christ and each individual church member, as well as Christ and the whole church. And, it is his job as a minister—as teacher—to present them, to prepare them to be a chaste virgin at the wedding supper.

So, here we have a great part of the work of the Church, which is Christ's body, in

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preparing the bride to be presented holy, pure, and undefiled to her Husband, Jesus Christ.

Now, let's go to Revelation 19, and see that actually occurring. The marriage takes place when Christ returns, and chapter 19 is a synopsis of the Return of Jesus Christ to become the Husband of the church, as well as to do all the things He must do as King of Kings and Lord of Lords

Revelation 19:7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

Now this parallels what we just saw there in II Corinthians 11, that the body of Christ has this job of preparing the bride for her marriage, the taking of her vows as it were, with the Son when He returns.

Revelation 19:8-9 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

So, once again we have this idea of her being clean, and pure. She only does righteous acts at this time. That's what clothes her, that's what you see when you look at her. Her glory is in her righteousness, the reflected glory that she has from God.

Revelation here emphasizes her part in making herself ready. We will see later Christ's part in making her ready. Here you see the cooperative acts between: 1) The ministry as betrother, and teacher; 2) The church as a whole, as student, and teacher; and 3) Christ Himself as bridegroom, high priest, and the many other hats that He stands under—[those things] He does in order to bring us to this point, to be a fitting bride for Him. And God the Father will only have a fitting bride who is righteous and holy for His Son. He will not allow any spot or wrinkle (as it says in Ephesians 5) to corrupt or defile that bride.

So, this process has to take place to prepare the bride for the Son, for her husband.

OK men. Let's get to some of the specifics. This introduction to the specifics has been to help us understand the level in which we are working at.

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Let's go to Colossians 3:19 because this is a very simplified version of what appears in more detail in Ephesians 5. I want to take it in this small bite first because, Paul deals with it very simply. I think that if we start simple, we can more easily go on from there.

Even though this is very simplified, this is the fundamental principle of husbandly behavior. If you only get one thing out of this entire sermon, make it Colossians 3:19. In a way, this is all you need! But, we will go on and expand it out.

Colossians 3:19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.

This is a positive and a negative way of saying the same thing, although there are specific meanings here.

This word love is "agape." You know that the agape type of love is selfless, outgoing concern for the other's welfare. Very simple concept, but very hard to put into practice.

Paul is showing here that the husband's primary responsibility in the marriage is to show love—outgoing, selfless concern—toward his wife.

He says, then, in the last part of the sentence, "do not be bitter toward them." This might seem strange. A strange way of putting it. "Bitter" is the literal translation of the word, here. We would probably use the word, "harsh," or "dictatorial," or "domineering."

Now, those are interpretations of this word, bitter, but in a way, that's how it comes out in one's actions. And, Paul was saying here that in a great way, this being bitter toward them is the exact opposite of showing love toward them.

You do not show love toward your wife by treating her harshly. You do not show love toward your wife by domineering her or the household. You do not show love toward your wife by telling her what to do all the time and dictating her every action.

Just because God has made the husband the head of the wife, and head of the house, does not give him the leeway to lord it over her. That would obviously not be showing agape love.

When has God lorded it over you? That is, of course, our example. He has always acted in love toward us. That doesn't mean that He doesn't do things that some might consider harsh every once in a while, because it is necessary. Of course, God has the

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wisdom to do it properly. He does it in true, Godly love.

It is hard for us physically to do, because we're stupid human beings. We have such a limited wisdom in these matters. But, that is part of the process of growing, and becoming a perfect husband just as Jesus Christ is.

I found a potentially humorous quotation from Adam Clarke on this verse that I want to share with you. He says,

"Wherever the bitterness is, there love is wanting. And where love is wanting in the married life, there is hell upon earth."

It is true. You can't find a worse place to live than in a house where the husband and wife do not get along, and in particular where the husband treats the wife poorly. Because, there is always going to be conflict there. There is always going to be strain. You don't want to be caught in the middle of such a thing.

Nothing makes a woman's submission to her husband more difficult than his heavy-handed control. Because, just like anything, if you have ever clamped a hand upon your child, or a pet, the first thing they do is to try and get away. And that's the same sort of thing that will happen if a man tries to be heavy-handed with his wife. She is going to resist. That is the opposite of submission.

It says in [the books of] James, and in Peter that if we want to submit to God: *Resist the Devil*. God demonstrates the opposing force at work. If you are heavy-handed with your wife then, she will resist. That isn't what you want. You want submission. That's what God wants. But, they will only submit if you, the husband, treat her in love.

So, that's the foundation here that we're working from. Every husband's action toward his wife should spring from kindness, and his concern for her good.

Let's read I Corinthians 13, because I think that it is appropriate and good to read through a part of this chapter just to remind us of what this agape love does. It does not give a definition of love, per se, but it will tell us how love acts; how it should come out in our actions. I'm not going to make particular comment on any of these verses, I just want to read them, and put them into the record, as it were, so that we are reminded about them. And, as we go through them, think about how you fare opposite each one of them.

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Are you doing these things? Do these things come out in your relationship with your wife?

And women can do the same in their relationships with their husbands, because it does work that way too. A wife is told to submit, but she submits in love. The same type of thing goes both ways.

So, I'm going to read verses 4 through the first part of verse 8, and I want you to just think about them. It would be a good idea to make it your habit to read these verses once a month and make them a checklist for you. Whether for you, or your relationship, it would be good.

I Corinthians 13:4-8a Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, [love] is not puffed up; [love] does not behave rudely, [love] does not seek its own, [love] is not provoked, [love] thinks no evil; [love] does not rejoice in iniquity, but [love] rejoices in the truth; [love] bears all things, [love] believes all things, [love] hopes all things, [love] endures all things. Love never fails.

Love doesn't stop. No matter what happens, love goes on. The one He ended with is interesting. *Love is always there.* It should always be being used.

Each one of these points could be a sermon in itself. Like I said, I don't have time for that right now. But, I wanted to get you, men especially, to think about these aspects of love. Because, it is important. It is how God expects us to treat our wives.

Let's read I Peter 3 for one verse that is specifically aimed at the husbands. He takes six verses to talk about wives, but then he takes one verse to cram in all the instruction that men need. He boiled it down. He doesn't use the word love, but basically what he does is to break it down for us a little bit, just as Paul did there in I Corinthians 13.

I Peter 3:7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

Now there are two phrases in here that I want to specifically focus in on. One, "dwell with them with understanding," and "giving honor to the wife."

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Literally what it says here is "living together in knowledge." The word "understanding" is implied. Living together with understanding. Obviously, it is husbands living with their wives with understanding, with knowledge. What it means, if I may put it into the vernacular is, "*Know your wife inside and out.*"

Now, you may think you know your wife, but you are not your wife. You don't know all the things that she knows. All the things that she desires. All the things that she hopes for. All the things she would like to do. You don't know how she reacts all the time. In fact, men usually are such dullards that they are surprised by the way their wives react to them when they do certain things. It is because, they haven't studied their wives well enough to know that they should avoid doing the stupid things that cause the big blowup in their reaction.

Dwell with them with understanding. Understand them, so that you can apply love properly. So, you have to study her.

Now, this puts a great deal of responsibility on those who are thinking of getting married. Because, this is when you learn a great deal. And, guys often stop once the ring is on the finger. They stop learning about their wives. And so maybe I should say the greater responsibility is on those who have already been married—maybe for a while. Maybe they have even forgotten some of the things they learned about their wives. But, it is necessary, if men are to be acting in love toward their wives, that they know her as well as she knows herself.

Of course, this takes forever! This takes all of one's life. That's why God wants us to have these long marriages. That's why God gives us these chances oftentimes to live say 50 years under conversion, often with this one particular person. It takes a long time to know a person inside and out. It takes a long time to know how a person reacts; what she likes; what she dislikes; what she hopes for; what she wants to do; how she likes to dress; where she likes to go; what her favorite dessert is; what kind of comedy she likes; what kind of drama she likes. You have to know these things and understand these things so you can please her, and do the things for her that are necessary to do. And I think that you get the point.

The husband has to understand his wife if he is to practice his love for her, and do good things for her. We could also maybe narrow this down to the phrase, "Be considerate of her."

Consider means "to think about." Think about her all the time. And, about what you need to do to show love for her.

Let's go on to the next phrase, "Giving honor to the wife."

Now, this is fairly well translated, as far as being literal. Give her honor. Give her respect. But, the implications are, "Consider her precious," or "Consider her valuable."

He also mentions her being the weaker vessel. He's putting into our minds this idea of a very dainty, fragile something. Maybe like a nice crystal wineglass that you prize for its value. But, one quick move in the wrong direction means the precious crystal goblet is dashed into thousands of pieces on the floor.

And so, the idea here is we're to give her so much respect, and think about her so fully, that we come to understand her true value. And, we consider her to be precious.

And then he says that we do this because we understand that she is our equal in our life of sanctification toward God's kingdom.

She is unique. She's special. She's a precious creature made just for us. And we have to understand the value that God has placed in her—on her—by making her just like that for us. If God considers her so valuable, we should consider her no less valuable. Because, she is our partner, she is the one we are one flesh with.

So, we must give her due respect. Give her the respect that she deserves. And it basically says here in a very stern warning right at the end of this verse that if you do not have the proper attitude toward your wife, if you dominate her, if you are superior toward her, if you are harsh toward her, or bitter toward her it is going to affect your relationship with God. Because you are devaluing something that God considers very precious.

And so, there is good instruction here. Dwell with understanding, give the wife honor, and make sure you don't treat her poorly because God may have something to say about it.

In fact guys, this is your primary area of growth—your relationship with your wife, and of course, subsequently, your relationship with your children.

And of course, we can add in all the other relationships that we have, but they don't come anywhere near this area here of our family life. In the area of growth and spiritual maturity, it all starts here.

And so, if you are treating your wife poorly; if you are not giving her the respect that she

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deserves; if you don't understand her very well; and it is coming out in improper, and terrible actions toward her; then you haven't grown a bit. And, it is a wonder, if that is the case, that God is hearing your prayers.

This is a very vital part of our Christian growth. If we have chosen to marry, we had better be doing it right.

Now, we have a few minutes to get into Ephesians 5. Actually, I don't think I need very long, because we've already gone through the main principles that are brought out here in Ephesians 5.

Ephesians 5:15-21 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.

You're probably wondering why I read that, because we haven't gotten to the marriage part yet! But, this is Paul's introduction to the marriage portion. This is a very important section so that we understand the proper foundation for what we have to apply there in verses 22 through 33.

But, let's just quickly go through this. What we are getting is instruction on 1) How we can walk properly, 2) redeeming the time, and 3) understanding what God's will is in particular matters. That's the reason why he starts the way he does in verses 15, 16, and 17.

And then he says he's going to give us necessary foundational attitudes, or items, that will make sure that this gets done. The first thing is, "*be filled with the spirit*," and this is talking about our relationship with God, and Jesus Christ. It is only by our relationship with Jesus Christ that the spirit flows properly.

So he says, the first thing you do in order to walk properly, redeem the time, and understand God's will, is to make sure that your relationship with God is right.

Secondly he says, be thankful. Now this is a general way of saying that we're supposed

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to understand our dependence upon God and our obligation to Him. Understand what we've been given, and understand also what our responsibilities are. And when we express gratitude toward God, we are saying this to Him, "*Yes, we understand what You've given, and we understand what You want us to do with it.*"

OK and the third thing is more personal between people—he says to submit to one another. It is the proper attitude we're supposed to have in our relationship with one another.

To recap: first we get our relationship with God straight; then, if we have this foundational attitude of being willing to submit to one another, we can begin to practice these practical matters he mentions as he closes the chapter.

OK. I'm going to skip over the section for wives.

Ephesians 5:25-33 Husbands, love your wives [same thing as he said there in Colossians 3], 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 [remember we saw a great deal in the Old Testament about cleansing and washing—the same thing comes now into the New Testament], 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. [Now we saw that in II Corinthians 11, and Revelation 19] 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 [howbeit even though there is this great mystery about Christ and the church, he says,] let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Now, he says here, "love your wife." This is not a general statement, because he narrows it down for us almost immediately, "Just as Christ..."—just as the perfect husband. He doesn't give us any leeway for doing any less. He says "love your wife just as Christ loves the church."

Now what kind of love is this? He goes on to define that too. "And gave Himself for it."

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This is the kind of love that is expected of us as husbands. He died giving Himself for His bride. What kind of standard does that set for us?

Paul in Romans 12, verse 1 says that we are to be living sacrifices. God doesn't demand our death for our bride. We are to be living sacrifices.

So what Paul says here is a mouthful. He says loving your wives is sacrificing yourself for their benefit. It is a life of sacrifice for you men.

Once we get married, we are not to live our lives for ourselves. There is a certain amount that we must do of course, but the life we live in the marriage relationship is a life of sacrifice, and service to our wives, and our children. We are to put the same effort for the good of our families as Christ did in redeeming and providing for His church.

If we have to suffer to provide for them, so be it. That's what we've been called to. Doesn't it say there in I Timothy 5:8 that if we don't provide for our own, we are worse than an unbeliever. So, whatever it takes for us to make sure that our families are fed, and clothed and housed properly, that's what we have to do. That's showing love for them.

If we would read through the gospels, and see the lengths that Jesus went to in order to preach the gospel and bring about God's purpose, we would have an idea of the length to which we should go to make sure that our families are living as well as possible.

Now verse 26 and 27 narrows the focus of Christ's loving work. And this is what I want to emphasize. His work was to make the church holy and pure. And how did He do that? By cleaning it through instruction. That's what it says. He washed it in water by the word.

He cleaned it through instruction. He made it holy by teaching it, and preparing it for marriage with Him.

So, one of the husband's primary jobs is teacher of his family: teacher and leader. A husband should be the spiritual head of the household, not the wife.

You know in these times, the wife is often the one who leads the family to church. The wife is the one that is seen doing bible study, or the wife is the one who is seen doing this or that to promote their children's education in spiritual matters. But, Ephesians 5 does not say that.

He says, that it is the head of the family's job to teach the family, to make sure that their

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spiritual welfare is good. He must take the lead in matters of religion. He must set the example, as a man, and as a servant of God for his family.

Guys, this is a weighty responsibility. If we are to wash our wives by the water of the word, and our children as well to make sure that they are set up for a loving relationship with their Creator in their own lives, then we should take the lead, and make sure that it happens.

We are to guide the family's religious instruction and our family's overcoming both by example, and by giving direction. We are a unit in a family. And it is the husband's job to make sure that everybody in that family conforms to their proper standard. And then that they head in the proper direction in taking responsibility for doing those things themselves.

And then he says we are to love our wives as our own bodies. This is just a way of saying a Christian husband is to be as concerned for his wife's and children's welfare—physical and spiritual—just as he is concerned about his own.

We should have at the top of our list, not just our own salvation, but our wife's salvation, and our children's salvation too, because that is at the top of Jesus Christ's to do list. That's what He wants for us—that's what we, as husbands, should want for our own families.

And of course, we do. But, when we consider this in relation to our own behavior (the way that we live our lives), are we actually doing that? Are we actually promoting their salvation?

So, we have a lofty goal. A lofty standard to reach.

I was going to omit this, but decided to go there anyway rather than bumble through it.

This is the Shulamite speaking to her beloved. This is the church, we could say, speaking about Christ. I want you men to think about how you would feel if your wife talked to you like this.

Song of songs 8:6-7 Set me as a seal upon your heart, As a seal upon your arm; For love is as strong as death, Jealousy [Zealous love] as cruel [unyielding] as the grave; Its flames are flames of fire, A most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, Nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love All the wealth of his house, It would be utterly

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despised [destroyed].

It is a beautiful sentiment. Are we living up to it? Is our love for our wives as strong as death? Or as unyielding as the grave? Are we showing our wives the proper love that they deserve? Husbands, love your wives! That's the fundamental instruction to us. This is essence of God's teaching to us about our marital relationship. Give yourself in service to her daily. Lay down your life in righteousness for her good. And, you will be on your way to becoming a perfect husband, just like Christ.

Thank you for your attention.