

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 2 Issue 43

November 16, 2003

Nourish Your Wife

Biblical Marriage Part 6

The Destruction of the Marriage Relationship

Since the fall, the marriage relationship has been cursed. What was once a loving, mutually submission relationship between Adam and Eve has become a war in which the woman sought to dominate the man and the man the woman.

Now this domination, this war between the sexes, was in full form as we approached the apostolic age. Marcius Cato, a Roman statesman of the second century B.C., wrote, “If you catch your wife in an act of infidelity, you can kill her without a trial. But if she were to catch you, she would not venture to touch you with her finger. She has no rights.”¹ This view would continue up through the time of Christ such that in the Roman culture of Paul's day, women were treated as little more than servants.

Yet, God's redeeming work changed all of this. As we look at God's plan for marriage we discover that far from a war-like relationship in which the men seek to dominate their wives and the wives seek to rule their husbands, God's plan transformed this relationship. In this transformation the man was restored to a position of headship which in a Biblical context is the position of shepherd or pastor. The woman was restored to a position of following God as He led through her husband. Skevington Wood wrote this:

“In Greco-Roman society it was recognized that wives had obligations to their husbands, but not vice versa. In this realm we see that Christianity introduced a revolutionary approach to marriage.”²

Now the passage that serves as the KEY text for this “revolutionary approach” is Ephesians 5:15-33. This passage is more a description of a pre-fall relationship than anything else. As one who is saved, spirit-filled, and submitting their rights before that of their spouse's the man is to shepherd his wife. The woman is to submit to the pastoral care of her husband. This is what constitutes a redeemed marriage.

This chapter continues our examination of this passage as we discuss God's plan for the role of the man in marriage.

¹ Commentary on Ephesians, Dr. John MacArthur, page 294

² Evangelical Bible Commentary, Dr. Skevington Wood, page 76

The Husband's Call

Ephesians 5:25, “**Husbands³, love⁴ your wives**, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.”

This is the call of the man in marriage. In fact, in the nine verses of this passage, Paul exhorts the man with this calling THREE times.

- Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives. . .”
- Ephesians 5:28, “So ought men to love their wives. . .”
- Ephesians 5:33, “So love his wife even as himself. . .”

Fulfillment of His Call

Love is the call of the man in marriage! Now in order to fulfill this call the man needs to follow the example of Christ.

Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, **even as Christ also loved⁵ the church**, and gave himself for it.”

Christ sets the pace for the man in marriage. As Christ loved the church, so husbands are to love their wives!

What is it that characterizes Christ's love for the church? And what therefore should characterize a man's love for his wife?

The Nature of Christ's Love: Sacrificial

First Christ's love was a sacrificial love.

Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, **and gave himself for it.**”

We discussed the context of this sacrifice last time. Christ's love for His people led Him to a Roman cross where He was crucified in our place. There is not a soul in this world without sin. In fact the picture of mankind is that they are in rebellion against God! Because of this rebellion, we rightly deserve the wrath of God and death. Yet, in spite of our wickedness, rather than allowing us to die, Christ took upon Himself the form of sinful man and died in our place.

From this we learn of the nature of Christ's sacrificial love. Christ took upon Himself human nature and forfeited His life for an unworthy, spiritually bankrupt, ungrateful people who in fact would rejoice at and participate in Christ's death. This is the sacrificial love of Christ. And that must be the sacrificial love of every man for his wife!

This is the cost of marriage! Yet, most men get married thinking they are getting a HELP-MATE. Sadly on account of the battle of the sexes, this concept is transformed into a rather husband-centered marriage.

³ ανερ aner

⁴ αγαπω agapao

⁵ αγαπω agapao

The woman becomes little more than a nursemaid or butler. God has ordained that the woman should be a helpmate in marriage, yet this doesn't obviate the fact that God entrusts the woman to the care of the man unto her growth and maturation in grace. While the woman has been called by God to serve the Lord by ministering to her husband and the call placed on his life, nevertheless — don't miss it — the man has been called by God to serve his wife unto her growth in grace which is a call to sacrifice!

The bottom line in marriage is not ones net worth. It is not how clean the house is when you come home. It is not that the bills are paid on time. Rather the bottom line in marriage is this: Is your wife growing?

If your wife is not growing, then it is up to the husband to see what needs to happen so that she does grow. Does she need a job change? Does she need a change of church? Do you need to pass up that promotion so that you can stay in a good church?

Biblical marriages require sacrifice. Welcome to marriage!

The man is to love his wife with a sacrificial love.

The Nature of Christ's Love: Purifying

Notice secondly that a man's love for his wife also should be a purifying love.

Ephesians 5:26-27, "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

These verses paint a picture of what Christ did for the church. He sanctified the church by setting the church apart unto the service of the Lord. He did this by delivering her from sin's guilt and pollution so that he might present Himself the church in her intense splendiddness or magnificence having no moral or spiritual stain.

These are the three things that flow from Christ's sacrificial love. Christ died for His bride for these reasons:

- He might sanctify her, verse 26a
- He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle, verse 27a.
- She should be holy and blameless, v. 27b.

The theme that emerges from these two verses is that of purity! The love that Christ has for the church results in the PURITY of the church.

In fact, notice a very important point, that which lies behind this passage is the Jewish wedding ceremony. The Jewish wedding ceremony had three essential elements. The first of these was the betrothal. This was the commitment of the woman to the man. In our culture, this would be much more than an engagement — because if the betrothed woman was unfaithful, she could be stoned — but less than marriage — no sexual activity occurred during the betrothal.⁶ Secondly there was the interval. This referenced the time between the betrothal and the wedding day. The interval was the time in which both the man and the woman made themselves ready for the wedding day. The man procured a dowry and prepared his house. The woman prepared herself for the wedding day — her possessions, dress, etc. The

⁶ Compare Matthew 1:19

there was the wedding feast. This occurred after an elaborate procession in which the bridegroom along with his groomsmen would arrive unannounced at the door of his bride and escort her and her bridesmaids to the wedding feast.⁷ The wedding feast then occurred which could last for days.⁸

This relates to our passage in this way: throughout the New Testament the picture of the kingdom of God is related to the interval in the Jewish Wedding Ceremony. Yet, unlike the wedding custom of Paul's day in which the woman readied herself during the interval, in the kingdom of God it is that Christ is preparing His bride! It is Christ who purifies and clothes her.⁹ And it is this loving activity that serves as the model for a man's love for his wife! The call of the husband in marriage is to prepare his wife for her ultimate wedding day! It is to prepare her so that she might be pure! This is the nature of the love a man must have for a woman. This is a purifying love! A man who loves his wife will make purity one of his chief concerns!

Thus any man who would desire his date to compromise her sexual purity is not fit for marriage. Any man who would willingly lead his wife into sin reveals that he really doesn't love his wife! Any man who refuses or fails to lead his wife unto the Lord says one thing: I love me more than you!

The chief area of a man's pastoral ministry as it relates to his wife is the character of His wife.¹⁰

This is where many men go astray. They are more concerned about their wife's cooking, cleaning, domestic skills, visible "submission," etc. than they are for their wife's godliness.

What a wonderful day it would be when a man came home from a busy day of work and wept not because his wife failed to do such and such but because his wife was not growing in her walk with God or her love for the Savior!

Now, we recognize that a husband cannot make his wife love Christ, so how can a man love his wife unto her purity?

How did Christ love the church unto its purity?

Ephesians 5:26, "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with **the washing of water by the word.**"

Christ purified the church through the "washing of water with the word!"¹¹

In ancient Greece, a bride-to-be would be taken down to a river to be bathed and ceremonially cleansed from every defilement of her past life. Whatever her life had been before, it was now symbolically purified and she would enter marriage without any moral or social blemish.

In an immeasurably greater way Christ gave Himself up for the church that He might purify it! Christ's cleansing of believers is not ceremonial, but real! Thus, God's plan of redemption when it comes to every Christian is their purity! It is with this same purpose and in that same love that husbands are to cultivate the purity, righteousness, and sanctity of their wives! Yet, notice that the WORD is the agent of

⁷ Compare John 3:29 and Matthew 29

⁸ Compare Matthew 22:1-4

⁹ Compare Revelation 21:2 ; 2 Corinthians 11:2 ; and Ephesians 1:4

¹⁰ Compare 1 Peter 1:15-16 and 3:3

¹¹ This is a reference to baptism. The efficacy of baptism is tied to the word of God!

sanctification.¹²

The husband who loves his wife unto her purity will himself be long in God's word and long in the applying God's word to his household. Now this doesn't mean that a man is to force his family to read God's word. But that, the man being a shepherd of his family according to the word of God will shepherd his family unto God's word. Dr. John MacArthur wrote this:

“Love wants only the best for the one it loves, and it cannot bear for a loved one to be corrupted or misled by anything evil or harmful. When a husband's love for his wife is like Christ's love for His church, he will continually seek to help purify her from any sort of defilement. He will seek to protect her from the world's contamination and protect her holiness, virtue, and purity in every way. He will never induce her to do that which is wrong or unwise or expose her to that which is less than good.”¹³

It is to the married man that I ask these questions: Are you purifying your wife? Are you praying for her purity? Are you providing for an atmosphere in the home that lends itself to purity? Does your talk encourage your wife to be pure? Are you laboring for the purity of your wife — and that gently?¹⁴ Are you setting an example and pace after which she should follow?¹⁵

In view of the man's call in marriage to be the pastor of the home (the head) we recognize that he must love his wife with a sacrificial and sanctifying love. And finally, the love a man has for his wife must be a providing love.

The Nature of Christ's Love: Providing

Ephesians 5:28, “**So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.** He that loveth his wife loveth himself.”

This was a radical statement in Paul's day. Recall, in the Greco/Roman world, women were nothing more than property to be used and thrown away. Yet here, Paul asserts the amazing truth: When a man and a woman wed, they become ONE flesh.¹⁶ The woman enters into the man's household and thus constitutes part of his covenantal community and thus part of himself! And thus, for a man to fail to love his wife is to hate himself, to practice self-degradation (an activity of darkness), and to violate the laws of nature as well as the laws of God!

Verse 29 instructs what a man is specifically to provide for his wife.

Ephesians 5:29, “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth¹⁷ and cherisheth¹⁸ it, even as the Lord the church.”

It is in the realm of PROVIDING for the wife's needs (emotional, spiritual, physical) that Paul concerns himself when it comes to a man's love for his wife — that is the nature of Christ's love for the church.

¹² Compare Titus 3:5

¹³ Commentary on Ephesians, Dr. John MacArthur, page 300

¹⁴ Compare Galatians 6:1-2

¹⁵ Compare 1 Peter 5:1-2

¹⁶ Compare Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-6, and 1 Corinthians 7

¹⁷ εκτρέφω ektrepho

¹⁸ θαλάπω thalpo

When the church needs strength, He gives her strength. When she needs encouragement, He gives her that. When she needs comfort, He comforts. When she needs aid, He upholds.

Philippians 4:19, “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

That is the love that Christ has for the church, and that is the nature of the love a man must have for his wife. A man who loves as Christ loves supplies all the needs of his wife an action described here as nourishing. This word primarily referred to the raising up of children. It means basically to mature. Husbands are called to nurture their wives unto their maturity in Christ whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. The term *cherish* carries the idea of tender, loving care. It is taking something or someone in one's arms and thus keeping them warm and safe. Literally rendered it means to “to soften or warm with body heat.” In the Bible it was used of the mother-bird sitting on her nest.¹⁹ Together, these paint a picture of a providing love. The love on the part of a man for a woman that is consumed with providing for her needs bounteously!

Verse 30 gives us the reason for this love.

Ephesians 5:30, “For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.”

Christ loves the church because to do anything less would be to neglect Himself. Likewise, recognizing that our wives constitute the covenant community of which we are apart, to not love our wives is to not love ourselves, much less God's kingdom!

This is such an important exhortation on the part of Paul. As the head of the home, the husband holds a position in which decisions will have to be made. At those times when a decision is made that conflicts with the counsel of the wife, the wife needs to see that her husband's leadership is motivated out of a love — for her, and not for himself! As one man put it, “The wife's submission is to be given to a lover, not an ogre.”²⁰

It is helpful to think of it in this light. If your home were a church — which means you would be the pastor — how would you like attending that church and sitting under its pastoral care? Would the needs of the body be met? Or would you be the Pastor who feeds himself and not the sheep? Are you a shepherd that expects to be served rather than serving? Do you seek after your own honor rather than the honor of Christ?

Now let me ask a very difficult question, “If leaving that church were a sin, how would that make you feel?”

Men, in our marriages let us be the faithful pastor who tirelessly loves his people. Let us faithfully provide for our wife's and family's needs. Let us prayerfully and humbly lead God's people to glory! That is what your wife needs from you more than anything else!

The Motive to Nourish

Ephesians 5:31, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto

¹⁹ Compare Deuteronomy 22:6

²⁰ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, page 234

his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.”

Verse 31 appeals to the pattern of the covenant community that lies behind marriage where the man is called to establish a covenantal unit by leaving and cleaving.

In view of the call that God has placed on our lives to pastor one of His households how could we do anything less than LOVE?

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

Verse 32 appeals to the picture that marriage represents: That of Christ and the Church. In view of God's purpose in marriage that it is to testify to the world Christ's love for us how could the husband who represents Christ in marriage do anything less than LOVE?

Now, whether or not we fully understand the previous two verses, Paul closes on a very practical note: He summarizes all that he has said in verse 31. And what is it that a man and woman must remember when it comes to their marriage? It is that each man love his wife even as himself. The call of the man in a marriage relationship is to Love his wife. And secondly, let the wife have respect or reverence for her husband. The call of the woman in a marriage relationship is to recognize the awesome responsibility that their husband holds as shepherd of the household and thus give the honor that that “office” holds.

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About the Preacher

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