

Indicatives & Imperatives in Marriage: the Husband, sermonaudio.com

Part 4

Ephesians

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Brothers and sisters, let us remain standing tonight as we turn in God's word once again to the book of Ephesians 5 as we continue with our study in this little letter of Paul to the church at Ephesus, and as you know, we have been concentrating our attention on this particular section in the book of Ephesians dealing with marriage. There is that transitional passage in verse 21 that we're including in this multi-part series, if you will. Technically this is the eighth sermon dealing with the subject of marriage with the bulk of our concentration has been verse 22 all the way to the end of the chapter. I, again, want to encourage you and remind you that all of these series of sermons dealing with the subject matter of marriage as we've delved into each of the parties, the husband and the wife alike, all of these sermons really are like chains that are linked together and are intended to be taken together. So if you have missed one or more than that, I'd encourage you to go back and listen to them. Tonight we consider the husband, part 4.

Let us read the entirety of this section as we have been and then we will begin. This is verses 22 to the end of the chapter of Ephesians 5. This is the word of God.

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 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. 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33

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.

Thus ends the reading of God's word.

Let me remind you that as we come upon this passage of Scripture, that we humble ourselves under it. I've mentioned to my wife on several occasions throughout this passage that this is as convicting to me as a husband as it would be to any of us in the room as husbands. So let us approach it humbly and openly as we receive God's word.

Let's pray.

Father, tonight we ask that You would humble our hearts to Your word. May you submit our hearts willingly under Your Lordship and we acknowledge Your word as Your will for Your people. Father, we pray that You would again instruct us so that we might think our thoughts after You and not think our thoughts after the whims and after the patterns of this world that are constantly changing with each new generation, it seems. Lord, we pray that You would root us in Your word that our hearts might be lodged in truth and that we would live out of that truth, particularly in our marriages. We love You and we pray Your blessing upon Your word tonight. Illumine our hearts and minds, Father. Give us ears to hear You speaking through Your word. For it is in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

You may be seated.

Well, we return tonight to this important subject of the marriage union, an institution that was created and designed by God himself. As its author, he has graciously provided us revelation in part into how he has ordered this marriage relationship, and as we have been repeating all along throughout this series, it's our desire to think our thoughts after him.

We've been considering the indicatives and the imperatives of each of the parties in this divinely ordered relationship. We've explored so far the indicatives, or the role, and the imperatives, or duties, of the wife in the marriage relationship. We also have considered the indicatives, or the roles, of the husband, and a few weeks ago we began to consider the chief duty or imperative given over to the husband that's found in four words: husbands, love your wives.

What does it mean to love one's wife? Well, thanks be to God he elucidates for us in the remaining verses what that actually means and looks like as he unpacks it for us. We're considering, really, six ingredients of what this love is. We've already considered three of those ingredients of the duty to love. We've considered its definition; we've considered its aim; and we've considered its manner. Well, tonight we're going to consider the final three ingredients which is its scope, its condition and its effect. Its scope, its condition, and its effect.

Well, as we've noted, Paul clearly sets up the husband as a mirror of the Lord Jesus Christ as he carries out his duties as a husband. He will carry them out as a faithful reflection of Jesus or he will reflect something that's not true about Jesus as head and husband of his bride. Paul has also well-established that the husband is the head of the relationship just as Christ is head of the church. We've noted before that while it may seem a bit rudimentary, we must recognize the head as the responsible party in the relationship. If anything can be said about Jesus' headship, it is that the welfare of his bride, the church, rests in his court of responsibility.

Now this humbles a man who may have thought himself in a position where he can now use and abuse his bride at his whim, since after all, she's the submissive party. No, this should humble him with a recognition that he actually stands in a position of responsibility for her, but what is the scope of that responsibility in relation to his duty to love his wife? Well, instead of attempting to come up with answers on our own, let us consider what Paul writes. Paul elucidates what this love looks like when he provides us this blanket statement, "just as Christ also loved the church."

Now we have considered the aim of this love which is, what? It is always for her benefit. Always aimed at her welfare and her good, that's the aim. The manner of this love is sacrificial, in fact, Paul says explicitly he "gave Himself for her." His love was demonstrated not in the way of warm fuzzies but in actionable steps of giving away his life in the shape of a cruciform. As we've seen, we men, husbands, are actually reflecting Christ most clearly whenever our love for our wives takes the shape of a cruciform, but to what extent did this cruciform love reach? Well, we find this purpose clause in our text in verse 26, if you'll look there in chapter 5, verse 26. He says the word "that," or maybe your translation says "so that." It says here, "so that He might sanctify," he "also loved the church and gave Himself for her," loved her sacrificially, "so that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." That is his sacrificial love's purpose, that is the purpose clause before us. His sacrificial love was addressing her as her. His sacrificial love was comprehensive in its scope, serving the whole of his bride, not a portion of his bride. He came not for the welfare of a portion of her, but all of her whole being, both body and soul alike. That's what we affirm the redemptive work of Jesus has won and accomplished, not just an inward spiritual soul result but also bodily. His responsibility was not just addressing her bodily need, though certainly she looks forward, we all look forward, to those glorious bodies that are a part of the redemptive work of Jesus in his love for us, but also he met the needs of her soul. Body/soul alike. That is what constitutes his bride and his love for her was comprehensive, reaching to both body and soul alike.

Now this seems so basic and so fundamental but it is something that we're most in need of concentrating our attention upon. It's often overlooked and misunderstood. It's very easy for a man to say, "Well, I assume responsibility for the welfare of my wife bodily, for her food, for her clothing, for her shelter, but when it comes to her spiritual welfare, she's left to herself. Physical health, I'm hands-on. I'm all in. It's within the scope of my love duties to lovingly provide for her bodily but spiritual health, I'm hands-off. That's

outside the scope of my duties to lovingly provide for her. How could the Lord ever expect me to exercise responsibility for her spiritual health? I'm not her Savior." Of course you're not but what you are is a mirror of the Savior to her and his love for her is comprehensive.

It's clearly evident that Christ came to serve his bride beyond just addressing her need for a redeemed body. Why wouldn't it be the other way around? Follow this logic with me. Why wouldn't it be the other way? Why wouldn't one say, "You know, I know Christ came to redeem his bride spiritually and I, in a mirror fashion, need to exercise responsibility for leading and nurturing her soul, but when it comes to her physical needs, I'm hands-off. No, she needs to fend for herself. That's outside the scope of my love duty to physically care for her. She needs to find a way to feed herself. She needs to find a way to clothe herself. She needs to find a way to shelter herself." You say, "That would be absolutely absurd." Surely it would be a disgrace to fail to provide for her, your wife's hunger? But this is what I want to posit before our thoughts tonight: shouldn't it sound at the very least equally absurd, if not more absurd and disgraceful, to say, "I mirror Christ so well by not leading my wife in the word, nurturing my wife in prayer, feeding my wife the bread of life, and enthusiastically guiding her to the means of grace. Surely that was outside the scope of Christ's pursuit of his bride." No, Christ came to sacrificially love his bride for her comprehensive welfare, the entirety of her body and soul, and as head he saw himself as responsible for "sanctifying and cleansing her," responsible for her spots, responsible for her wrinkles, responsible for her holiness, desiring, we even feel the impulse here, when Christ came it was to sanctify her so that she would be presented as holy. Her holiness was the goal of the whole thing, it could be said. Pursuing her holiness and sanctification is at the heart of Christ's love for his bride.

Now we're going to come back and consider more carefully the redemptive aspects of these two verses, 26 and 27, but for now we're focusing on what is packed into the imperative to love one's wife because that's what Paul is doing here, he's unpacking what that is. If we husbands saw the scope of our responsibility for the welfare of our brides to include her spiritual sanctification, I think this would transform at a very very practical level the way that we see our duty to love her and how that is carried out.

If that is the scope, on what condition is he to serve her and pursue her good? Let's consider that condition. There is an ingredient that actually comes to us in part tonight by way of silence in our passage. You'll note that in all that Paul has to write about sacrificial love of the husband in relation to his wife, he never at any points mentions that the reason for doing so lies within her loveliness, and doesn't lie within her merit or her sweetness. In fact, it's quite the opposite. She is the one with the wrinkles and the spots and in need of washing, the Scripture says. She's the opposite of pristine and exquisiteness.

That is the bride that Jesus came to save, not one that's pristine, and this is not to mention the manifold passages in the New Testament, indeed the whole Bible, that characterizes the sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus Christ as one of grace. What is grace? Is it extending to one what is due them? Is it extending to one what they've merited? No, it's

the opposite of that, you see. That's why it's a free gift, not based on any condition in you. Grace isn't grace if it's given on the basis of meritorious conditions. His act of love for his bride was not conditioned upon her splendid estate but it was conditioned in the fact that she was his, bound to him in covenant marriage. That was the condition. "She's Mine and I'm bound to her by covenant." And he loved her without any condition whatsoever found in her. Isn't that remarkable? That's the remarkableness of the Gospel, is he loved us who had nothing to offer.

Now this should strike the hearts of us husbands who so easily and so often treat our wives according to what we believe they deserve while all along Christ, whom we mirror, has demonstrated his love towards his bride not according to her deserts, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us; who has dealt with us not according to our iniquities and sins but according to his unconditional mercy. Oh, how important it is for we husbands to take care to appropriate this ingredient of biblical love into our definition of what it means to love our bride wholly unconditionally. Wow. It really strikes at the heart but, oh, how we need to set our minds upon this element of that kind of love.

Well, having considered the husband's duty to pursue his wife's good sacrificially, the comprehensive scope of the husband's love and the extending of that love unconditionally, let's finally consider the effect of his loving his wife in this way. This is, I think, perhaps one of those little portions of Ephesians 5 that is often just skimmed over but is, wow, it's so profound.

Look with me at verse 28, "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." Now just think for a moment, and I think this is worth pondering, think about the manifold ways that one cares for the body. In fact, if we started making a list from the time we woke up in the morning, we'd probably give up making the list. You know, every morning there is perhaps the comfort of a warm tea or a warm coffee, right? There may be a walk or a jog to get the heart pumping. There's likely a warm shower to have the pleasant sense of cleanliness. Then one eats breakfast to satisfy one's hunger. And that's just a brief snippet of one's cares for their body. You could factor in other things like shaving, grooming the hair, putting on clothing to cover the body to keep it warm, raising an umbrella to keep you from getting soaked, putting on thick warm socks so you don't get a chill and get a cold. I mean, and the list goes on and on of the ways that we care for the body and treat it, well, cherish it might be a good word. Nourish it, that might be a good word. That's the word that Paul uses.

He nourishes and cherishes it. No one has ever hated his flesh, in fact, the opposite of all these things I just mentioned off is almost unthinkable, to take layers of clothing off when it's cold so that you would get a chill to the point of death. How absurd. Sleeping out in the elements of the weather instead of sleeping under a shelter. That's detrimental to the body. Enjoying an unsanitary body with whelps all over the skin instead of seeking comfort with cleanliness of a shower. I mean, the opposite is almost absurd to even consider and here Paul gives us this very point. Now watch this. He's saying the union that one shares in this relationship of husband and wife is so united, so united that their

welfares are entwined with one another. Their welfares are tied up together such that when I'm pursuing her good, guess who's good I'm pursuing? My good. This one flesh bond, this union, is that tight and intertwined.

You see, the effect of pursuing my wife's good and by nourishing and cherishing her, has the effect not only of bringing about her good but bringing about my good. That's what Paul says here. For one, to love his wife is to love himself by seeking her welfare through nourishing and cherishing her. Remember how we talked about that treasure, treating her as this delicate treasure, a thing to be valued and cared for with great attention, guess who's welfare is sought? The husband seeks actually his own welfare in the end. That's the effect by loving her just as the Lord does the church.

In marriage counseling, usually the symbol that I will use is the symbol of infinity. It's like a sideways 8. I put a W in that little slot, and an H in that one. Husband and wife. They are so intertwined with one another, to pursue her good is to pursue my good. When I'm not pursuing her good, when I'm not pursuing her welfare, guess what I'm doing? It's as if I am producing a self-inflicted wound on myself. It's actually quite sad when one does not nourish and cherish his wife and I'm sure we all have seen that in our own hearts and lives and perhaps in others. It's a very sad case when it's extreme, for little does that man know, that's why the heart breaks for him, little does he know that he's doing that which is not only injurious to her but more strikingly he's doing the very thing that's injurious to himself by not cherishing and nourishing her. It's absurd, so absurd it's like inflicting harm on one's self.

I'd like to read this quote to you. It is a few sentences long but it's worth it. "One of the most important dimensions of the analogy between Christ and the church and a husband and his wife is the importance given to the wife. Christ never regards his bride with a casual interest or considers her of secondary importance. That's no small thing. Consider the responsibilities that belong to Christ as King of the cosmos. He is not a do-nothing King with only titular importance, he is an extremely busy King. His is the responsibility for maintaining the entire universe. He must see to it that the sun rises every day, the stars remain in their courses, earthly kingdoms rise and fall, and a host of other things, but with this schedule he still has time for his bride. If ever a husband had a right to neglect his wife it's Christ, yet the petitions from the church are not relegated to the attention of minor angels in a heavenly bureaucracy. No, Christ intercedes for his people daily. He's never away on business and never too busy for his bride. He gives himself without reservation. What woman would mind submitting herself to that kind of love?" Man, what kind of woman would not mind submitting herself to that kind of love?

Wow. One might say, "Wow. You know, if my wife were to treat me that way, the effect would be her benefit too," one might say, and you know, that practically might pan out, but I think this is rather potent. Paul doesn't direct that at the woman. This brings us back to the weightiness of the head's responsibility. He does not give this directly to the woman to nourish and cherish her husband so that as she pursues him in love, she loves herself. He actually directs this in this long paragraph, again, he gives much more attention to the head than he ever does to the submissive party. It's his duty to nourish and

cherish her. It's his duty to pursue her comprehensive good. It's his duty, verse 28, "husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies," and in so doing there is this promise that he, the husband, will actually be pursuing not only what's best for his wife but what's best for himself and what's best for his marriage. Why are these things not the wife's given duties? It's because she is not reflecting Christ in this relationship. He is reflecting Christ in this relationship.

Look at verse 29 again, "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it," comma, "just as the Lord does the church." This is the duty that Jesus possessed as head of his bride. As head of his bride, his calling was to love her by nourishing and cherishing her. This wasn't a luxury to be engaged in when it was convenient or when she was worthy of it, but it was part and parcel of being the husband. A duty to nourish. A duty to cherish.

I was able very early in my ministry to study one summer at the desk of one of my early mentors. He was a pastor and he and his wife were out of town and we stayed at their home and I was able to study at his desk, and something that struck me has stayed with me ever since and it had to do with an index card. On his desk was a piece of glass and underneath that glass he had a few index cards of memory verses that he was memorizing out of the Bible, but there was another index card that he had slid under the glass kind of close to where you'd be sitting. His wife's name was Nancy and this is what he had written on that card. "What have you done today to encourage Nancy as your sister, as your wife, and as your children's mother?" That stayed with me for, we didn't even have children at the time, but I think found in that kind of word that he was speaking to himself daily as a pastor, it made a huge impression on me because I think that attitude and that approach reflects in part what Paul is saying is true about our husband, the Lord Jesus Christ, always seeking to encourage and build up and nourish and cherish his bride that he is covenantally bound to. Not because of anything in her but because she's his and he is in a covenantal marriage with her.

Supremely hanging on that cross, brothers and sisters, as brutal as it was, what you should see, at least in part, is our husband loving his bride, cherishing her and nourishing her, as it were, through that very act on that cruciform. Oh, what a husband to whom we're united, a perfect husband, and what an encouragement to us sinful husbands who fail again and again in our very imperatives that we take seriously, but it grieves us when we do not live up to the duties that we're called to, that causes our eyes to look again to our perfect husband, is it not, that one who nourishes us and cherishes us and the one through whom we have power to live according to his will?

Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank You for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We're thankful that even in these duties and these responsibilities and these roles that You speak to us in, in chapter 5 of Ephesians, You say much more about Jesus than You ever do about us, You say so much more about His church that He loves and cherishes than it does about us. Lord, we love You and thank You for our perfect husband who loved us in this way, so

unconditionally, loved us comprehensively body and soul alike, and Lord, we do long for that day we will have new bodies and hearts that are truly clean, perfected, to present us before the Father. We love You and we pray, Father, Your blessing upon us. We especially lift up to You all of us who in our midst in this church are husbands that are called to that great high calling and role as head of our marriages. Lord, may You forgive us of our many sins. May You work within our hearts all of these qualities that we find about the way Jesus loved His bride. Help us to love our brides as we ought as we seek to reflect that perfect love of our Lord Jesus for His. We love You and we look to You in Your strength and Your Spirit's power to please You. We pray it in Christ's name. Amen.