

Wisdom for Husbands
Walking Wisely in Marriage – Part 1
Palmetto Baptist Church

Text: *Ephesians 5:25-33*

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their 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 Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” (ESV)

Introduction:

- As we noted in the previous message last Sunday – this material is in a section of Ephesians where Paul reveals how God wants believers to live out the daily implications of the gospel in light of the immense thing He has accomplished through the ministry of His Son, Jesus Christ – a “*cosmic shalom*”.
- Through His obedient life and His voluntary, sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus established an unbreakable peace/shalom between God and His creation. Since that peace was made by Him and is sustained by His presence at the right hand of the Father, this shalom is secure – it will hold – for as long as the “peace-maker” lives throughout eternity.
- However, though this peace has been won, it has not yet been fully implemented by the peace-maker, Jesus the Messiah who has triumphed over the cosmic powers of wickedness who are openly hostile to God and implacable in their rebellion against Him.
- This cosmic peace will one day be established on this earth and will fully experienced by those who dwell in the kingdom God has promised to Christ and over which He and His bride, the Church will rule in righteousness (*and for which Christ is now preparing her*).

- God in a stunning display of His wisdom, grace, mercy, and power has established an outpost on earth where this “shalom” reigns and where it shines forth for all the universe to observe and render thankful praise the glory of God that brought this shalom to reality in the lives of a particular community of people – the Church.
- In this section of Ephesians, Paul has been giving inspired wisdom to these people (God’s household) so they will know how to walk in ways that display, preserve, and promote this shalom created by His Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:1-3).
- Since God’s household is made up of smaller units – the individual units of Christian households – Paul now instructs members of these Christian households so that the power, wisdom, grace, and mercy of God will be displayed in order that their individual households will shine like lights in a dark culture – displaying the transforming beauty of the Gospel that God has made available to all.
- We have finished the section where God gives specific instruction to wives in those Christian households. Beginning in 5:25 and going through the end of the chapter, Paul turns to the Christian men who lead and serve those households and gives them a very important and distinct instruction – **love your wife**. This is His wisdom for Christian husbands for walking wisely in our marriages and in our homes.
- The truth was that in Paul’s day, the Ephesian Christians lived in a culture and in a society where the home and marriage were very different from the plan God outlines here for Christian households.
- In this culture it was not unusual for a father to take unwanted children (usually daughters) and to abandon them out in the wilds – a horrible practice called “exposure” – regardless of the feelings of his wife.
- It was not unusual for wives to have little or no affection for their husbands on account of a host of evils he committed against her.
- It was not unusual for children to receive little affection from their father nor to have any affection for him. In fact, in some cases where the father was wealthy – it was not unusual for the sons to plot the demise of their father and of each other in order to obtain his wealth and status for themselves.

In this culture where the household was the center of the empire but where it was so often horribly disfigured relationally – God called the members of His household to live in a radically different way in radically transformed relationships in their own individual households!

- Wives were to joyfully, voluntarily submit to their husbands!
 - Husbands were to willingly, sacrificially love their wives.
 - Children were to honor and reverence their fathers.
 - Fathers were to nurture their children with tender affection.
 - Servants/Slaves were to voluntarily obey their masters.
 - Masters were to graciously and kindly serve their servants.
-
- And – the watching world would marvel at this display of “shalom” – unity, order, grace, truth, mercy, and love – and would wonder why it was so? ***What had so transformed this household? Answer: Christ through the transformative power of His gospel!***
 - On a human level, there was one primary individual in each household who held within his power the ability to make an immense, transformative difference in the atmosphere and culture of that household – its leader who in his different roles was husband, father, and master. At the head of all of the different ways in which he could create such a compelling display of “shalom” in his household was the way he used his position, power, and authority. Would he use his power and authority to advance his own agenda or that of his household? Or would he use his power and authority in ways that truly served and advanced the wellbeing of his wife, children, and servants? Would his leadership manifest the qualities common to ruling or would it be marked by serving those he led?
 - Paul has one massive primary instruction of this Christian brother – and that is to genuinely and consistently display unconditional love toward those he leads! Paul follows up with specific ways in which this love should manifest itself to his wife, to his children, and to his servants. ***The text before us this morning fleshes what it actually means for a Christian husband to love his own wife.***

I. The Reality Scripture Addresses: *Husbands, love your wives.*

- Paul was writing to men living in a culture that had very different views about marriage (in general) and about the way husbands postured themselves toward their wives (in particular).
- Most marriages were arranged and were structured in ways that would best advance the economic standing of household or the social standing of the head of the household. While some marriages were difficult due to the harsh, demanding leadership of the head-of-household, there were marriages where the husband treated his wife with respect and even at times as an important partner in the oversight of his household.
- Roman and Greek philosophers did encourage husbands to display certain kinds of love toward their wives. For example, *Phocylides* encouraged husbands to “*love (sterge) your wives for what is sweeter than when a wife is lovingly (filoz) disposed to her husband ... and strife does not split them asunder.*” Another Roman philosopher, *Musonius Rufus*, observed, “*In marriage there must be above all perfect companionship and mutual love.*”
- Greek and Roman culture had at least *three different terms* to describe different ways they envisioned the concept of love.
 1. *eroz* – described a response based on something seen and desired in its object. Some inner or external beauty that appealed to the eye of the beholder and created a desire to have or enjoy what it saw – in this case, a person.
 2. *filew/filoz* – loving affection usually associated with friendship between two individuals who had a strong point of compatibility or common shared experiences with each other.
 3. *storgh* – the affection, loyalty, and tenderness found naturally in human family relationships – fraternal love between siblings that causes them to act for the good of each other because they are members of the same family.

- However, there was a fourth word – a word not often used in Roman and Greek culture to describe the kind of love between a husband and wife – the word **agape**.
- Although this word was relatively rare in Paul’s day, it became a very common term used by the NT writers, especially Paul. It occurs in its noun or verb form 259x in the NT and 109 of those times it is used by Paul – 20x in Ephesians alone.
- The unique aspect of love that this term presents is its free, unrequited loyal affection and selfless action for the benefit of another person without any regard for self-advancement or reward. Often this kind of love would be demonstrated to someone who had no power or ability to return that love or to give anything back to the one who was doing the loving. Sometimes this love would be displayed to someone who did not merit this love or who was unlovely in the eyes of the beholder – in its most noble expression, toward an enemy.
- Usually, this love was costly and demanded some expenditure of energy or resource with no return for what was invested. This love became associated with costly sacrifice toward someone who did not merit this love and without power to return this love –this word describes the kind of love that is ***unconditional*** and ***sacrificial***.
- Finally, this unconditional, sacrificial love is by no means dispassionate – it is filled with tender affection and loving devotion.
- In a culture where men viewed their wives as the keeper of their household and the mother of their children – it was socially acceptable for them to engage in immoral relationships or keep a concubine. Their wives were expected to faithfully serve and obey and to tolerate these affairs.
- ***While some men would feel affection for their wives – it would never occur to most men to love their wives the way Paul describes when he uses the term agaph.***
- No one in Ephesus would have anticipated getting this kind of mandate from Paul to love their wives in this way ... this kind of love had no parallel in Roman or Greek e marriages and households.
- So ... what exactly would this kind of love demand from a husband?

II. The Responsibility Scripture Demands (v. 25a)

“Husbands, love your wives,

When talking to Christian wives, Paul summed up God’s wisdom for them in 40 words contained in 3 verses. By contrast he is going to take 125 words in 8 verses to present God’s wisdom for Christian husbands. Clearly God puts the weight of the passage on the responsibility He assigned to Christian men!

A. This is a command – it isn’t optional.

B. This is to be done willingly – not forced love; but eagerly with joy.

C. This is to be done persistently – not just every once in a while.

D. This is to be done selflessly and sacrificially – (agaph) love that seeks the highest welfare of the person being loved!

- One commentator put it this way, *“Paul’s expression implied that the love a husband ought to have for his wife should be so broad, so long, so high, and so deep that it would include the sacrifice of his own social prestige, well-being, and even his life (if necessary) for the sake of his wife.”* (Theilman)
- This language is remarkably similar to what Paul said in describing the immense love that Christ has for His wife, the Church in Eph 3:18-19 where Paul concludes that the immensity and the intensity of this love actually surpasses human knowledge.
- No matter who she is or what she is like, Paul tells Christian husbands to love their wives in such a way that others who witness this love struggle to comprehend what they are actually seeing! Those who observe this love should be prompted to ask, *“How can someone actually love another person in this way and to this extent?”*
- So ... where is a Christian husband to look if he desires to learn how to truly love his wife in this way?
- Paul points him to a model he can use to shape his own love for his wife – the way Christ actually loves His Church.

III. The Role Model Scripture Presents (v. 25b)

“...as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

Christian husbands are to love their wives in the very same way wife Christ loved His Church. So how did Christ love His Church?

A. *He loved Sacrificially – He gave.*

This refers to a huge, defining act of sacrifice that Christ gave – His life! This is talking about His death on the Cross!

- *The life I know live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:20).*
- *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:11)*

B. *He loved Voluntarily/Willingly – He gave Himself*

This was not a forced sacrifice but willingly given out of deep love and desire for her well-being.

- *“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)*
- *“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” (John 10:17–18)*

C. *He Loved Selflessly – He gave Himself for her*

- The preposition Paul used shows that Christ’s gave his life to benefit the Church. In other words – His love was motivated by what was best for the other party rather than what was convenient for Him!
- As the Head of the Church, Christ had every right to be served – but instead He sacrificed for the highest good of His Church!
- So what exactly was the “good” that Christ intended for His Church by means of His loving sacrificial service for her?
- *(By the way, although not in the same way for to the same degree, these same objectives ought to shape our own love for our wives. We should strive to lovingly lead and serve her in ways that facilitate Christ’s work in sanctifying her as opposed to putting obstacles that make it harder for her.)*

IV. The Objectives Scripture Advances (v. 26-27)

“that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

Paul defines three primary objectives that Christ had in loving and sacrificing for His church – they can be summed up in one idea: Preparing His Church for Her big day when He presents her as a bride in brilliant, resplendent glory! (note the 3 *ina* clauses)

A. *To Sanctify and Consecrate Her to God*

that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word

- The idea here behind sanctify is to set apart – to consecrate.
- It refers here to the salvation Christ procured for the Church – and the resulting cleansing and consecration to God which was mentioned first in Ephesians 1:4-5, 7.
- This consecration is described as “washing” and happens through the application of His Word to the Church. So what exactly is the “word” that does this initial cleansing that sets apart people to God? Answer – the gospel message! (*note the allusion to Ezk 36:25-27*)
- “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (*1 Corinthians 6:11*)
- “Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.” (*Jn 15:3*)

B. *To Present Her back to God in a Glorious Condition*

so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,

- The idea behind “present” is a formal and public presentation – a delivering over to someone.
- Here it has the idea of formally presenting the Church as His Bride before His Father and all the Universe.
- His stated goal is that she appear restored to her full glory and splendor having no stain/blemish or wrinkle to defile her! No stain from sin and no blemish in reputation!
- It is Christ’s purpose that on this day, she appears in brilliant glory – *endoxa*.

- Adam and Eve were initially clothed with this shining glory but lost it after they sinned – they were naked. All of their offspring has fallen short of this glory (Romans 3:23). However, when His bride (a group consisting of all believers) is presented on that day, she will be shine will brilliant glory!
- We have little glimpses of this – for example, Moses’ face shone with glory after being in the presence of God (Ex 34:29-35; 2 Cor 3:13); Elijah and Moses with Christ at the Transfiguration (Matt 17:2-3; Mk 9:1-4; Luke 9:28-31 – note Elijah and Moses also appear in brilliant glory like Jesus; 2 Peter 1:16-18).

C. *To Enable Her to be Holy and Blameless*

... but that she should be holy and without blemish.

- Christ gave himself sacrificially so that His Church could be morally and ethically holy and pure!
- He did this for individual Christians (1:4) and now here in this passage for the entire Church!
- So how is Christ bringing this amazing transformation about in the lives of His people? There was a gospel word that set them apart as God’s own people ... but ... what is the word that will actually bring about their restoration to this glorious appearance that was lost at the Fall?
- ***The means for this cleansing and restoration is a washing with the Word of God --*** (rhma = individual statements of Scripture. “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” (John 17:17)

V. The Reminder Scripture Gives (vv. 28-29)

“In the same way husbands should love their 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 Christ does the church,”

- Loving someone this way and for these objectives is difficult under any circumstances; it is especially so if the one being loved is resistant to these spiritual objectives because of something she sees or experiences from the way her husband is leading her!

- To help Christian men love in a way that actually removes obstacles to the work Christ desires to do in their wives, Paul introduces a second illustration of how Christian men are to love their wives.
- They are to love their wives like Christ loved the Church – sacrificially and with the goal of advancing the spiritual growth and maturity Christ desires to bring about in their wives. And the specific way in which each husband can actually do this is by loving his wife as he loves his own body – by cherishing and nourishing her with tenderness and affection as God uses His Word to progressively sanctify both of them. Paul is ruling out any harshness or verbal roughness on the part of a Christian husband to his wife.

A. *They are to nurture their wives*

- The idea here is to strengthen in a careful and tender way just like a father would do a child (Eph 6:4).
- A man knows exactly how to develop his body – he knows its limits and how much it can take. He knows when to keep the pressure/discipline on and when to back off. And even when, for the betterment of his body, he pushes its physical limits – he also cares for it and is conscientious to avoid damaging his body. So a husband should do with his wife.

B. *They are to cherish their wives.*

- The term “cherish” has the idea of warmth or tenderness.
- Paul used it to describe his ministry to the Thessalonians as the affection of a nursing mother for her child (1 Thess 2:7).
- So it should be with a man’s wife!
- A man is not unduly harsh or rough with his body – even when asking it to endure hardness or pain, there is a tenderness with which he handles his own body. There is also a tenderness that marked the way Paul handled Christ’s body. And most importantly, this tenderness marks how Christ handles his people (Matthew 11:29)

- This means he is going to have to take the time to know her intimately– dwell with her according to knowledge (1 Peter 3:7). This also means he is going to have to guard his heart and his actions lest he become hardened and harsh toward her (Col 3:19).

Because this is so difficult, Paul closes this section by giving four Biblical reasons for why a Husband so love in this way.

VI. The Rationale Scripture Explains (v. 29-33)

“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

A. Nature Designed It (v. 29)

- It is a fundamental truth hardwired into our nature from birth that we love ourselves / our bodies.
- This truth is so fundamental that the Scriptures use it to help us understand how to fulfill the entire 2nd half of God’s law – we are commanded to love our neighbor as we love ourselves! (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39; Mark 12:31; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8).
- No neighbor is nearer and dearer than our wife. Since she is your nearest and dearest neighbor, love her as yourself

B. Scripture Substantiates It (v. 31)

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh

- When God designed marriage, he designed a unique relationship where two individual people become so inextricably joined together they are considered as one – what happens to one happens to the other. They are an inseparable unit – two as one.
- This insoluble union is one of intense, deeply personal, and unspeakably joyful intimacy shared only between the two.

- Because God designed this relationship and describes it in these terms, you have a biblical reason to love you wife as yourself ... because in a unique and very real sense, she is you!

C. *Christ Demonstrates It and You Experienced It (v. 29b)*

... just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body

- When Christ redeemed us, He made us part of His body – the Church. This reality is much more than just alerting us that we are now part of a larger group that Jesus Christ leads – members of His organization or team.
- The amazing reality that Jesus is referring to is that we are actually “in Him” – in other words, we are so unified to Christ that whatever happens to Him happens to us. That is why Paul can say, “I have been crucified with *Christ*.” When He died, there is a sense in which we died with Him. When He rose from the tomb, there is a sense in which we were raised with him which is why Paul goes on to say, “*It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*” (**Gal 2:20**).
- Whatever happens to one member of this union happens to the other. Theologians refer to this amazing truth as our “union with Christ.”
- And Scripture tells us God designed marriage to work in a similar way. Therefore, because our wives are so closely united to us, we should treat them as though they were actually us because in a sense they really are us – a wife is so tightly united to her husband that she is him.
- Christ nurtures and cherishes us by providing everything we need for life and godliness. On a smaller scale, Christian husbands should strive to do the same for their own wives.

D. *God’s Master Plan Demands It (v. 32-33)*

“This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

- Paul announces something about marriage that God has kept secret until the time He revealed it to Paul. Paul describes it as a great mystery or a mega divine secret that is now being revealed about marriage.
- That secret is that God designed marriage to communicate something stunning to every creature in His universe, both in heaven and on earth.
- What God wants the universe to know and understand is the special (*unique*) intense love and deep devotion that Christ has for those of us who make up His Church. A love so intense and so deep that He is willing to make ultimate sacrifices in order that we might be with Him and share in His glory.
- This intense love motivated Him to step down from His glorious display as the Second Member of the Trinity and take upon himself the humble, non-glorified form of a servant. His love moved him to even greater depths – to suffer a horrific kind of death – criminal execution for crimes we committed. So that we could be with Him and share His glory and His place forever.
- When God wanted an illustration that would communicate that to everyone on earth and in heaven, He designed human marriage.
- Men, that is why our marriages matter so much to God. And that is why they come under so much attack from Satan. How you love and serve your wife as well as why you do so – for her benefit and not your own – is God’s cosmic display of how His son feels about his former enemies who collectively and individually have become His dear wife.

Conclusion:

- Regardless of how you were taught to think about marriage – whether by your upbringing, the surrounding cultural norms of the day about marriage, or even the religious expectations about marriage in your

particular sacred tradition – Paul gives a very distinct and defining perspective on marriage to which he expects believers to conform.

- Paul’s instruction to Christian husbands is much more than just giving them the secret to a happy wife, a peaceful home, and a good life.
- Paul actually wants husbands to see and embrace the immense responsibility God has given them to display the glory of God’s gracious love for His people to the entire universe by loving their own wives in the same way and for the same reasons that Christ loves His Church.
- Moreover, Paul gets very specific with each and every Christian husband. It is as though he approaches us individually and looks us in the eye and tells each one of us ... ***Husband, love your wife as you love yourself.***
- If we are honest, this is not just a sobering responsibility and a difficult assignment – it is humanly impossible in our own strength.
- There is only one source for the strength a Christian husband and wife need to reproduce in our marriage a miniature display of the intense love and tender devotion Christ has for His people and the loving devotion and committed loyalty that the Church has for Christ.
- That strength comes only by the transforming power of the Gospel to shape our marriages as we live in the wisdom and by the power of the Holy Spirit – which is why Paul began this entire section by exhorting us to let the Spirit fill us with the attributes of God and to fully control every part of us by the Word of God (***Eph 5:18***).
- So ... given the intensely personal appeal that Paul places before each of us, I would like to ask each husband to do something – I would like to ask you to take your wife’s hand in yours and say to her, “*I am so thankful God gave you to me and by His grace and for His glory, I want to truly love you – not for my good, but for yours. Not by my strength but in His. Not according to my wisdom and ability but according to the wisdom He has given us in His word.*”
- ***I want to love and serve Christ by loving and serving you!***