

Marriage and Family Series
The Ultimate Husband (Part 2)
Ephesians 5:25-33
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Well, we return this morning to our study of Ephesians 5 and the role of the Christian husband. This week as I was studying this, I was reminded of my days of high school football. I grew up in Mobile, Alabama as you know, and during the summer, I'll never forget those hot August practices. One particular year we had a man who was a graduate of the University of Alabama. In fact, he'd played under the great Paul "Bear" Bryant. He was our coach that year, and he understood the importance of preparation and of hard practice. And I remember those practices because, you know, in Mobile, it rains almost every afternoon, and so there was this oppressive heat: 97 degrees and about 105% humidity. And it was just utterly oppressive. And of course, the ground was wet. So, as you did these monotonous drills over and over again, your helmet got muddy, and your facemask was caked, and your clothes were all dirty, and you were dying of thirst.

And as we were digging it out in the trenches, I was just hoping that soon, the practice would be over. But I'll never forget what this coach used to say during those hot August afternoons when we were just ready to be done. He would say, and you can complete it, "No pain, no gain." Now if there's truth to that statement, then I've made a lot of spiritual gains this week because as I've gone through this passage, I've encountered a great deal of personal pain. And I'm confident that you men will, with me, this morning. You will feel my pain before we're done.

Ephesians 5. Let me read to you these profound words of the apostle to all of us who are husbands. Verse 25,

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So, husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, because we are

members of His body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband.

As I mentioned to you last week, and as we looked at the first part of this together, the core of this message to us as husbands is this: as Christian husbands, we are to pattern our love for our wives after Christ's love for the church. What an incredibly high standard. Christ is described as the one in John 13:1 who loved his own to the end. Literally, He loved His own to the nth degree. He loved them perfectly. What an incredible standard. Obviously, we can't love our wives perfectly, but there is something that is to correspond to Christ's love for the church in our love for our wives. And the key question for us to answer as we go through this passage together is, what are the similarities? In what ways is our love for our wife to be like Christ's love for His church?

Well, Paul identifies for us in this passage four essential qualities of the love that Christian men should have for their wives. We looked at the first quality last week, and that is, our love for our wives is to be a sacrificial love. Verse 25, "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself up for her." We looked at what it means to sacrifice ourselves for our wives. If you husbands weren't here last week, I encourage you to get the tape. And wives, I'm sure you will encourage them to get the tape. This is absolutely foundational. We are to live for our wives as Christ lived and gave Himself for the church.

You remember in Mark 10:45 he says, "I didn't come to be served, but to serve." And that's how you and I are to see our responsibility to our wives. They're not there to serve us. Of course, there's a sense in which our wives are made for our helpers. We've talked about that in weeks past. But there's another sense in which we're not to demand that kind of service of them. Instead, we are to give ourselves in self-sacrificing service to them.

The second quality that Paul identifies here in the resemblance that our love is to have to that of Christ, and this brings us to where we left off last time is that: our love is to be a sanctifying love; not only a sacrificial love, but a sanctifying love. Notice verses 26 and 27. He did this,

so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.

Now, to really get Paul's point here, you need to follow the flow of his argument. Notice the chronological order of the events he describes. In verse 25 the first event is that Christ gave Himself up for the church. That is, He died for the church.

The second chronological event is found in verse 26. He cleansed the church by the washing of water with the word. Now, you'll notice I skipped the word "sanctified". That's because in Greek, as in English, that participle "having cleansed" throws that event before sanctification. In other words, the "having cleansed" comes before the main verb "sanctified" in time. So, first He died for us, for the church, and then He cleansed the church. First, He died for the church, and then He cleansed the church.

Now, what's this a reference to? Well, the word "cleansing" here is a reference to the spiritual reality that happened at the moment of regeneration. It's the same thing that's recorded in Acts 15:9. "God cleansed their hearts by faith." In Titus 3:5 Paul writes, "God saved us by the washing of regeneration." That's what this cleansing is referring to. This is a spiritual cleansing. It's a spiritual cleansing that occurs at the very moment of salvation. "Having cleansed them...." he says. But this cleansing is profoundly illustrated and pictured in the outward symbol of baptism. That's why he mentions water here. He says, "having cleansed her by the washing of water." It's not that baptism cleanses us. In fact, He goes on to say what the real cleansing element is. Notice at the end of the verse, "with the word". You see, it's the Word of God that produces this cleansing of the heart, the Spirit using it.

So, Paul here is referring in this expression, "having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" to the spiritual cleansing that occurred at the moment of salvation. If you're in Christ, you were cleansed in this way. At the moment of salvation the Spirit of God used the Word of God to give your soul a bath, as it were. And baptism was merely the picture, the symbol of that reality. So, Christ died for the church, and then in a moment in time He cleansed your heart if you've come into faith in Him.

The third part of this chronological process, then, is the first part of verse 26, "that He might sanctify her". Now that you have been cleansed, Christ is embarked on a process of sanctifying you, of sanctifying His church. That is, of setting us apart, of making us really and practically and personally holy. This has always been Christ's chief concern for His church. You

remember back in His earthly ministry, in John 17, a passage that's often called the High Priestly Prayer of Christ. It's the longest recorded prayer of Christ we have in Scripture. And in that great prayer on the night of His crucifixion He prays to the Father, and He says, "Father, sanctify them [speaking of His disciples] in the truth; [or by means of the truth] for Your word is truth" And then He adds, And I'm not just praying for them, that is for these eleven. Judas had already gone out. He said I'm not just praying for these eleven, but for all of those who will believe through their word. That's you and me. He says I am praying that these eleven and everybody sitting in Countryside Bible Church in the year 2005 would be sanctified by means of the truth, all of those who are genuinely in faith in Christ. This is a consistent theme, a consistent concern.

Notice in Titus, Titus 2:14, Paul has been talking about the grace of God that appears and that instructs us in how we ought to live once it delivers us and saves us. Verse 14, he describes Christ in this way. "... [He] gave Himself for us" [watch this, in order] "to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." This is part of what Christ had in mind. He didn't save you just to keep you out of hell. He saved you in order to make you holy.

But the question is, why? Why is it so important? Why does Christ want us to be holy? Well, that's a huge question with a number of answers given in the New Testament, but notice the answer Paul gives in Ephesians 5. It's a very interesting one. He says that Christ wanted us to be sanctified, or He wanted us to be holy. Verse 27, "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she would be holy and blameless." Christ wants us to be holy for this reason. Now, this is an amazing picture really. This beautiful image that's given to us in this verse grows out of the marriage customs that were so common in the first century. Since you and I weren't there, let me just remind you of what the customs there were. It'll make this passage, I hope, come alive to you. If you had lived in the first century, this would be the process by which you would have been married.

The thing that came first was the betrothal. The betrothal was a more serious and binding agreement than our engagement. You know, our engagements, you can make or break them as often as you like. But the betrothal was made in the presence of witnesses, and the man and the woman and their families were there, and they acknowledged that they all agreed in the arrangements that had been made for this marriage; both the fact that the couple would get married, as well as how much the dowry would be, and the other aspects of the wedding. Now, don't think of the dowry as a true purchase price. It wasn't that the wife was considered property. It was simply an acknowledgment that the family was going to lose out on her

productivity through the years, and so there was a compensation for that loss of her commitment to that family and the productivity that she could bring through the future years. And so, there was this agreement that was made. This betrothal began with this ceremony, with witnesses. These are the arrangements, these are the agreements, and we are all fully in agreement with these terms. And then God's blessing was pronounced upon the marriage.

Now, between that ceremony and the wedding itself was an interval of time. But from the day the betrothal began, from the day of that ceremony, the couple were legally considered man and wife. If they wanted to end their relationship, it required a divorce. But they still lived separately, and they were not allowed to consummate the marriage. Usually, this interval lasted long enough to complete whatever arrangements needed to be made. Maybe, you know, it's like some of you who when you got married, the groom was poor and needed to work a little bit longer to accumulate a little more dowry money. In your case, maybe for an engagement ring, or that first apartment, or whatever it was.

The other part that needed to be arranged was of course the wedding itself. And particularly the man needed to prepare a place for him and his new bride to live. Now, in the ancient world, it was typical for a man to actually add on to his father's house, or at least on his father's land to construct a home for him and his new bride. That happened during this interval of time. This interval of time between the actual betrothal ceremony and the wedding itself was rarely more than 12 months. But it gave time for these arrangements to be made.

When everything was ready, then the date for the wedding was set. And the final part of the process was the preparation and procession for the wedding feast. Now, typically, the time and date would have been announced, and the bride would begin to prepare herself, just as today. She would prepare herself by primping and preparing the right clothes and making sure that she had just what she wanted for that special occasion. And the groom would clean himself up and put on his best clothes. And then, accompanied by his friends he would make a procession. It usually happened at night, so they would go with torches through the streets of the village singing and dancing, and they would make a procession with the groom and his friends to the house of the bride.

When they arrived there, they would take her with them and the procession would make its way back through the streets, back to the home that they would eventually live in, back to his father's house. Now, when they arrived there, that evening, at the actual marriage itself, the marriage was consummated that night as well as, there was a great feast that began that evening. And the

festivities would sometimes last up to a week. In fact, in secular history, it could last up to two weeks. And you thought your child's wedding was expensive!

Now, that's the background of Ephesians 5:27. Get the picture. The church, that's us, we have been betrothed to Christ. Christ has submitted a significant dowry. It was Himself. You remember the great hymn, "From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride. With His own blood He bought her and for her life He died." We now live in the period of the interval. We have been betrothed to Christ, but the wedding feast and the wedding have not yet come. It's time for us, the bride, to prepare for His coming. He's going to come and take us to Himself. How do we prepare? Well, it's interesting. Revelation 19:7 says that the bride prepares or makes ready herself. There's a sense in which we contribute to this process.

There's also a sense in which the spiritual leaders God has put around us help prepare us for the wedding. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 11:2 says, "I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin." So, there's a sense in which we prepare ourselves. There's another sense in which those people who are our spiritual mentors and leaders help prepare us and help us become holy.

But as Ephesians 5 says, ultimately, Christ Himself is the one who must prepare us. In fact, it's even more emphatic in the Greek. It's that He Himself might present to Himself the church in all her glory. Christ wants a glorious bride, a bride splendidly dressed and prepared for the occasion, with not a spot, not a facial wrinkle, not a single blemish that would distract from her beauty. And Christ Himself, as the groom prepares His bride. He wants us to be holy and blameless. You see, we can't prepare ourselves for the wedding. We can't sanctify ourselves. Christ has ultimately to do that. And when He's done, the church, and each of us individually will be without moral or spiritual stain whatsoever. Isn't that an amazing reality? There's coming a day when we will be this bride, without spot or blemish or anything that mars our characters.

Get the picture here. I can't leave this without your getting the picture of Christ and the church. Right now, we have been betrothed to Christ. If you're a believer, you are part of the bride of Jesus Christ. And right now, Christ is in the Father's house preparing a place for us. Isn't that what He said in John 14? I go to My Father, and I go to prepare a place for you so that I may come and receive you to Myself. That's what that's all about. It's a picture of the ancient wedding. He says, I've gone to fix a place. You're my betrothed, and I'm going to come and get you again. He's making us, at the same time that's He's preparing a place, He's making us

presentable to be the bride we ought to be; holy, and spotless, without blemish or spot. And He's going to return. He's going to come with a grand procession to get us and to take us to Himself. And Revelation 19:7 and 8 describes the wedding and the wedding feast.

Now let's come back to Paul's practical point here, men. Paul's point relative to marriage is this: our love for our wives is to be like Christ's love for His church. That means, very explicitly, our greatest concern for our wives must be for her sanctification. Our greatest concern for our wife should be her spiritual well-being. As the great commentator William Hendrickson put it "Husbands should love their wives for what they are, and they should also love them sufficiently to help them become what they should be." Let me ask you husbands. Do you love your wife like this? Do you love her with a sanctifying love? You know as I've thought about this week, I've asked myself, how is it, men, that we can demonstrate that kind of sanctifying love to our wives? Let me give you a short list I made.

First of all: we can demonstrate a sanctifying love by being holy ourselves. You see, we can't lead our wives where we've never been, and so the responsibility falls on us to be the Godly men that we ought to be. We can't help them grow in spiritual sanctification if we ourselves aren't growing.

Secondly, another practical implication is: we must do nothing that would expose our wives to sin and temptation. We must do nothing that would expose them to sin and temptation. Let me talk for a moment to you younger ladies that are perhaps dating and looking toward marriage. This begins before marriage. If he says, you know, I just love you so much, and then he wants you to violate the Word of God by becoming involved with him sexually before marriage, he doesn't love you. We're talking about selfish, unbridled lust. You see, the true biblical love is a sanctifying love. It's a genuine concern for your spiritual well-being. And this continues after marriage. You know, I have unfortunately encountered situations before where there were professing Christian men who were trying to talk their wives into watching pornography with them to somehow stimulate the relationship. What a terrible perversion. And certainly, that is diametrically opposed to the kind of love we're told to have here. It is to be a sanctifying love.

Our desire, men, is to present our wives before the Lord without blemish, without spot, pure before Him. Our love is to be a sanctifying love. By the way, a more subtle form of leading our wives into sin, maybe you're sitting there thinking, well, I've never done, you know, I've never asked my wife to do those things. But a more subtle form of leading our wives into sin, men, is when we are so stubborn or so unkind or so hurtful in our words, that we drive them toward sin, toward sinful anger, toward bitterness with us, or toward despair because of how we treat them.

A third practical implication of sanctifying love is: that we must do everything within our power to promote their spiritual growth. everything we can to promote their spiritual growth. And that really dovetails with number four: we must be the spiritual leaders of our homes. If you want to have a sanctifying influence on your wife, it means that you have to take the responsibility for being the spiritual leader. Men, we should be the ones who are making sure the family is involved in the life of the church, and are here for corporate worship. We should be the ones who are leading a regular time with our wives and family, studying the bible and praying together. Maybe you say, you know, I just don't know how to do that. Well, listen, there are resources in our bookstore that will help you know how to do that. But this is our role.

Tragically, in many Christian homes it's the wife who ends up being the spiritual leader by default. Now, what happens? What message does that send the children, men, when you abdicate your spiritual leadership in the home, especially boys? What message does that send your boys? It tells them, you know, the Christian faith is fine for women, but you know, real men don't really need that.

And finally: if we are going to love our wives with a sanctifying love, we must be the spiritual leaders of our wives. Turn to 1 Corinthians, a very interesting passage in 1 Corinthians:14. As Paul is dealing with the issue of tongues, he says this in verse 34:

The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in the church.

Now, what's going on here. Notice that in the context of telling women that they are to keep silent in the corporate worship of the church, Paul tells women not to ask their elders if they have questions, although there's nothing wrong with that. He tells them to ask their husbands. Now what is the implication of that? The clear implication is that their husbands will know the answer, or will work hard to find out. Douglas Wilson writes about this passage, "A man may not be a vocational theologian," in other words you may not get paid to be a theologian, "but in his home he must be the resident theologian. This famous passage is not such a restriction for the wives as it is a requirement for the husbands." Are you the spiritual leader in your home? We are to play the role of Christ with our wives, men. We are to love them with a sanctifying love.

The third quality our love must have is: it must be a nourishing love, a nourishing love. Notice verse 28, “So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh but nourishes it.” “Husbands ought....” It’s an interesting Greek expression. Literally, it means husbands are morally obligated to love their wives as their own bodies. Now, many people have misunderstood this expression and think that Paul is somehow here encouraging self-love. Well, you know, you need to love yourself, or you can’t love your wife. That’s not what he’s saying at all.

Paul is saying that you should think of your wife as part of yourself. Thus, to love her is to love part of you, and if you really grasp that she’s a part of you, it is rational and reasonable to care for her just as you care for your own physical body. That’s what he’s saying. This just makes sense. “For no one ever hated his own flesh or body.” In other words, no person in a sane state of mind, hates and refuses to care for a part of his own body. Listen to the imminent theologian and commentator Charles Hodge, he writes:

It is just as unnatural for a man to hate his wife as it would be for him to hate himself, or his own body. A man may have a body which does not altogether suit him. [I resemble that remark.] He may wish it were handsomer, healthier, stronger, or more active. Still it is his body. It is himself, and he nourishes it and cherishes it as tenderly as though it were the best and loveliest a man ever had.

Ever seen a man in front of the mirror? It doesn’t matter how ugly it is. He’s admiring it. He’s admiring himself. Some of you have met Lance Quinn. It was always hillarious, and he will probably hate me for telling the story. But you would go in the restroom, and he would see himself in the mirror, and he would say, it happened again, “I got better looking.” Listen to what Hodge says, he goes on, he says,

So, a man may have a wife whom he could wish to be better or more beautiful or more agreeable, still she is his wife. And by the constitution of nature and the ordinance of God, a part of himself. In neglecting or ill-using her, he violates the laws of nature as well as the law of God.

That’s exactly right. You know, a number of years ago I was playing softball, in fact, it was my last softball game. And I played for a church league actually connected with Grace to You at the time, and I was probably too out of shape to be playing. I’d been an editor for a number of years

and hadn't been as active as I should have been. But I'd always played softball, so I thought, I'll play again, and I signed up and enjoyed most of the season. But toward the end of the season I tried to stretch a single into a double. And I was too busy watching the man who was fielding the ball to really pay attention to what I was doing, and I started my slide late. Now, normally that wouldn't have been a problem, but in California, particularly in the city type leagues, they use these hard bases. They were like bricks. And they were in the ground on a metal stake. So, they weren't moving. And they weren't giving.

Well, the fact that I started my slide late was not a good thing, because my body just pushed my foot right on through this base, and what ended up happening was I terribly wrenched my ankle and broke my foot. They had to carry me off the field. By the way, somebody asked, the worst part was I was out. But imagine if you had heard me talking after that injury, if you had heard me talking to my foot like this. Listen, I am just fed up with your not doing your part around here. I mean, I am sick and tired of your whining and complaining, and after all I've done to provide for you, and to put a roof over your head, I just want to know, what's in this relationship for me? I'm the one always putting out, always making the sacrifices. You are just pathetic. I hate you, and I wish you'd just leave. That's ridiculous. You would never say that.

Well, men, it's just as ridiculous to speak to your wife that way, to treat her with that kind of contempt. By the way, when my foot was broken, you understand this, I was especially tender with it. I mean, let's admit it men, we're wimps when it comes to pain sometimes. I didn't put any weight on it, and I was even gentle in how I touched it, you know, for a while.

Paul uses the analogy of how we care for our own bodies to teach us that we should care for our wives. Notice he says, we nourish our bodies, therefore we should nourish our wives as well. This language is often used in the first century to refer to marriage, in fact there is a marriage contract that I read this week that was found in the papyri where a man promises to cherish, nourish, and clothe his wife as part of the marriage contract.

What does it mean to nourish? The word "nourish" occurs in only one other passage in the New Testament, and that is here in Ephesians 6:4 where it's translated, "bring them up". But the word literally means "to feed". To feed. in the same way that I feel the weight of providing for the needs of my own body, I should feel the responsibility to provide for my wife's physical needs, for all of her needs. That's what it's saying. Nourish them. Care for them. Feed them. Take care of all of their physical needs. There are several biblical passages that speak to this same issue. We won't take time to look there, but in Exodus 21 there is a very interesting verse. You

know in the Old Testament, God makes it clear that one man, one woman for life was the divine pattern and standard. Christ restates that in the New Testament. He said that was always God's plan. But for reasons that we probably won't understand until we get to glory, God allowed, tolerated, polygamy in the Old Testament. But in the law as He dictates how that's to be handled, He says, if you take another wife, then you are not to diminish the food, clothing, or conjugal rights of the first wife.

Now implied in that, is part of our responsibility, men, to our one wife. The one wife that God intended for us to have. We are to provide for them, for food, for clothing, and for their physical needs sexually. In fact, that's reiterated. Turn to 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 7. This is reiterated. Verse 2, Paul says,

But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. [He's talking here about the sexual aspect of marriage.] Verse 3, The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*, and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come [back] together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Listen men, you and I are to care for our wives physically in every way. This is made even broader in 1 Timothy. Turn to 1 Timothy 5, this responsibility we have. First Timothy 5, here Paul is dealing with the issue of widows. And he deals specifically with the issue of widows, and then he steps back, and he issues a general principle. Notice 5:8, "If anyone does not provide for his own and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." You and I, men, have the responsibility to nourish our wives, that is to provide for their physical needs in every sense, to fail to do that is to be worse than an unbeliever. Hendrickson writes, "Paul is not thinking only of supplying the body with barely enough food, clothing and shelter to enable it to eke out a mere existence. He refers instead to the bounteous, elaborate, unremitting and sympathetic care we bestow on our bodies." Isn't that true? That's how we're to respond to our wives, to nourish them in that way.

Now what are the practical implications of this nourishing love? Let me just make it for you briefly. Obviously, men there are times when the wife is crucial to supporting the family.

During times of pursuing advanced education, or perhaps you as the husband are out of work. But men, you and I should feel the weight of the responsibility. We should see ourselves as having the key role as provider. That means that we shouldn't construct our budget so that we must perpetually depend on our wives' financial support. Instead, we should see it as our duty to support them. That doesn't mean they can't contribute, that doesn't mean they can't have a significant role. We are talking about responsibility. The weight falls on us by God's design. Christ calls us to love our wives with a nourishing love.

That brings us to the fourth quality our love should have: it should be a cherishing love. Notice verse 29, "for no one ever hated his own flesh, but cherishes it, just as Christ does the church." "We are to cherish our wives," what does that mean? Literally the word "cherish" means "to keep warm". It's used only one other time in the New Testament and that's in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, of a nursing mother tenderly caring for her child. What an interesting picture. You see men, we aren't just supposed to provide for our wives. There was a generation before us that saw that as their sole responsibility as husbands. She should be happy, I mean, she's got a house to live in and food to eat. No, Paul says we are to love them not only with a nourishing love, but with a cherishing love. We are supposed to be tender with them in the same way a nursing mother treats her newborn child. You're a father, you've seen that. You understand that picture. What a powerful image, that mother nursing that child, with such tenderness and compassion. That's how we are to interact with our spouses, with that kind of tender cherishing love.

Now I want you to turn to 1 Peter, because Peter expands this concept of cherishing love in a very direct way. First Peter 3:7, he tells us what this looks like. What does it mean to cherish your wife? Here it is, "You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way." Let's stop there, there's his first, our first responsibility. We're going to cherish our wives. It starts by living with them in an understanding way. Literally this says, living together according to knowledge. Men, I'm going to tell you something that won't surprise you, but learning to live with a wife is something that you have to learn how to do. And it's our responsibility to learn how to do that. Live with your wife in an understanding way according to knowledge. Alexander Strock in his excellent book on the difference between men and women writes this.

Some men don't seem to have a clue about how to treat a woman. They are insensitive to their wives' needs and feelings. They can't understand their wives' frustrations and hurts. They think only of their own careers and self-fulfillment. They exhibit incredible selfishness and callousness. They are capable only of

making women suffer. These men need to repent, seek counsel, and study God's Word on being a Christian husband.

The opposite, men, of understanding our wives and dwelling with them according to knowledge, of really seeking to understand them, the opposite of that, and I've seen this with so many men, is to become embittered against them. That's why Paul says in Colossians 3:19, "Husbands, love you wives and do not become embittered against them." Because they're different than we are. All right, you know that. They're different, and so you can either seek to truly understand them and what makes them tick and why they are the way they are and what ways you can express your love to them. Or you can simply say, psheh, I don't know what's going on with her again. Or you can become embittered.

God says live with your wives in an understanding way. Notice what Peter says next. In the middle of the verse, he says, and I also want you to show her honor. Show her honor. Here is another way to cherish your wife. Show her honor. This means that you think well of her, this means that you speak well of her and to her. You treat her with honor. You see, too many husbands make their wives feel worthless and unappreciated. They take her for granted. They intimidate her. They humiliate her. They criticize her. They put her down constantly. That isn't showing her honor, that isn't treating her in a cherishing way. That isn't Christian, it's pagan. Peter, notice, gives us three reasons for understanding and honoring our wives. If these don't do it for you nothing will. Look at the three reasons he gives us. Here's why you ought to understand her. Here's why you ought to honor her.

He says, first of all, "because she is the weaker vessel". Now ladies that isn't condescending. It's a mere physiological reality. But weaker, listen carefully to this, weaker is not a flaw if it's part of the design. Think for a moment of a fine china teacup, and compare that with a stainless-steel mug. The bone china teacup is definitely weaker than the stainless-steel mug, but who wants to go to high tea and drink it from a stainless steel mug. Weakness is not a flaw if it is part of the design. And it was part of God's design. So, understand her, honor her, because that's the way God designed her. And it's part of His great plan. To attack that in your wife is to attack the creative power and wisdom of God. You're saying God didn't know what He was doing when He made her this way.

He gives us a second reason, because she's a fellow heir of the grace of life. A fellow heir of the grace of life. Listen men, there is no marriage as we know it in heaven. Certainly, relationships will continue, but the marriage structure that's here on earth won't continue in heaven. She is

not always and forever your responsibility. She is a fellow-heir. She is your spiritual equal before God. And only for a short time here on earth are you put in a position of leadership over her.

There's a third reason Peter gives us, and this is the most potent of all. He says you'd better do this. If you don't, your prayers will be hindered. In other words, God takes these commands seriously. To live with your wife in an understanding way, and to honor her, and if you don't, then God isn't listening to you. Let me put it bluntly. A Christian husband cannot mistreat his wife and be a spiritual man. The two do not go together. In fact, that kind of man will find himself under divine discipline, with the heavens as brass. If you, I've often said this to husbands, if you aren't caring for and cherishing and listening to your wife, then God isn't listening to you. It couldn't be any plainer than that. So, we are to constantly be working and understanding them and showing them honor. Or as Paul puts it back in Ephesians 5, we're to cherish them as we do our own bodies. Why? Because this is how Christ treats us.

Notice back in Ephesians 5. He says I want you to cherish them, nourish and cherish them, just as Christ also does the church. I wish I had time to stop here. Imagine that image for a moment. This is how Christ treats us. He nourishes us. He provides for all of our needs, and He cherishes us. He treats us as a nursing mother does that little child. Why? Verse 30, because we are members of His body. Listen, we are to treat our wives as part of our bodies because they are. We've become one flesh with them, just as Christ treats us because we are one with Him. We are part of His body.

How do you treat your wife with a cherishing kind of love? Well, let me encourage you men to start by just telling her you love her. Some men find this really difficult. You know, the sort of the John Wayne, well I just find it difficult to say that. You know, it's like the man who said, look, you know when I married you, the day I married you, I told you I loved you, and if I ever change my mind, you'll be the first to know. That may be like the John Wayne or the Clint Eastwood type of man, but it's not like our God.

Listen to how often, read the Scripture and listen to how often the Father expresses His love to Christ. You know, the heavens open at Christ's baptism, and what does He say? This is the Son I love. Listen to Him. Christ is saying I love the Father. Love her. Treat her with tenderness. Treat her with tenderness, guys. Don't treat her like the opposing right guard.

Some men will say to me, you know my wife just isn't feminine enough. My first question is, maybe you don't treat her (consider if you treat her) femininely? Maybe she's not feminine

because you aren't treating her that way. Be courteous to her. In other words, treat her more like you did when you were dating. You remember that. Be courteous. This is a way to cherish her as a nursing mother does her child. Tell her how much you appreciate her. Praise her. Cherish her like Christ does us.

Now men, let me ask you a question. Why do you think all of this is so important to God? Why does it matter so much to God how we treat our wives? Well, Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:31. He quotes Genesis 2:24, He says, "for this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh." Now the first part of this verse describes the priority of human marriage. And the second half describes this incredible joining of two lives into one life. Certainly, pictured by the sexual relationship, but much more profound than that. And Paul says, let me explain to you what I am talking about here, why I quoted this verse. Verse 32. This mystery is great. Literally the Greek text says, "this is a mega-mystery". The English word "mega" comes from a Greek word, our English word. This is a mega mystery. What is this mega mystery? What is a mystery? Well, in biblical terms a mystery is something that has not previously been known but now has been revealed. So, what is this great mystery?

It's this, guys. Ultimately, marriage is not about us. God didn't give you your wife primarily to satisfy you and your needs. There's something much bigger than us going on here in marriage. I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. You see, it's not about us. Instead it is a profound object lesson. Marriage is a faint earthly picture of a deep spiritual reality. Let me just bring it down to the brass tacks. Your marriage and mine captures in vivid color the relationship of Christ to His church. The crucial question for us is, what kind of picture does our marriage give? What picture of Christ do others get from how you treat your wife? As I said last week, it's always a picture. You're always a picture of Christ. It never stops. The only question is what kind of picture of Christ are you? Are you an accurate picture of His tender nurturing, nourishing, cherishing, sacrificial, sanctifying love for His church? Or is the picture of Christ you portray a slander of His holy name?

Verse 33, Paul brings it all to a conclusion. "Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself." As you can kind of see in the English text, Paul uses a strange expression in the Greek text. He compiles word after word to make the point that every individual husband is responsible to do this. Nobody is exempt. If you're a husband, then you need to love your wife as Christ loved the church, with a sacrificial love, with a sanctifying love, with a nourishing love, and with a cherishing love.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for Your Word. We confess to You that, as men, we don't come close to this standard. Lord, we are so prone to selfishness, and self-seeking. We're all caught up in our lives and our careers, and Lord, we don't love our wives like this.

Lord, I pray that You would give us Your wisdom and Your strength. Lord, don't let us be content with that. Lord, I pray that You would help all of us as men here today to commit ourselves to get on the path, to move on with the journey, toward becoming this kind of husband: because it honors You, because You've commanded it, because we love You, and we want to obey You.

Lord, I pray that You'd help the men here who need to seek out their wives and ask their forgiveness for not being this kind of man, this kind of husband. I pray that You'd give them the grace and courage to do it. Help them to be a man.

Lord, I pray for others here, who as they see this standard, realize that they are none of these things, and they don't meet this standard in any way. Lord, perhaps it's because they don't have any life in them. They've never seen the love of Christ themselves, never experienced the love of Christ themselves, and so they can't live that love out to others. Lord, I pray that You would open their eyes today, that You would help them to see the reason for their spiritual weakness is that they are dead in trespasses and sins. Help them to cry out to Christ.

And Father, help us as a church to have men who live like this, to be known as men who provide the right kind of picture of Christ and His church.

We pray it in Jesus name, Amen.