

How to Love Your Wife
Ephesians 5:25-33
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I do invite you to take your Bible this morning, and turn with me. We're going to be looking primarily at Ephesians 5, and if you're already there, keep your hand there. But I want you to turn back with me, as we begin this morning, to 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians chapter 7. This is an amazing chapter. It's about singleness and marriage.

Paul here sort of goes through all the different scenarios of singleness and marriage and what Christ expects of us in those different scenarios. He begins with people who are married, and specifically begins the chapter by saying that there is within marriage a responsibility that we have to our spouse in terms of physical intimacy. He says in verse 5, "Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

In light of that comment, he says in verse 6, "But [I say this] ... by way of concession, [and] not of command." In other words, he says, "I'm not commanding you to take a short time apart from each other for prayer, I'm saying that is permitted, but if you do, it needs to be a short time, as I've expressed."

And then he speaks of his own marital state at this point. Verse 7, "Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am." There's a lot of debate about whether Paul was ever married or not, but clearly at this point he was not. And he says there are great advantages to being single, and he's going to express those as the chapter unfolds. You can be more devoted to serving Christ than the person who's married.

Having said that though, Paul makes a profound and far-reaching statement in the second half of verse 7. Notice what he says, "However, each man [that is, each person] has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that." He's talking about singleness and marriage, and he says when it comes to the state of singleness or a state of marriage, each one has been given by God that gift. That is a remarkable statement because it means that by desire, and by capacity, by

providence, God has made certain people, He's gifted them at least this state in their lives, to be single.

If that's you, understand that you're not a second-class Christian, that you're not somehow less. You're in step with Christ Himself and with the Apostle Paul. There is great advantage to being single. You can devote yourself in a greater way to serving Christ than someone who's married, Paul goes on to say later in this chapter.

However, both Scripture and human history show that our Lord has gifted most of us for marriage and family. And so, I want us, over the next few weeks, to step away from our study of the book of Romans where we've been now for a couple of years, and for the next four weeks to consider what Scripture teaches about this crucial issue of marriage and family. We live in a culture that is completely antithetical to what our Lord commands of us. We need to understand how we are to live in our marriages and homes. Now today, we start with husbands. And that brings us back to Ephesians 5 where I invite you to turn.

Now, as we begin to study this passage, we have to come to it with Paul's basic premise in mind. The husband is the head of the wife, not *ought to be, is*, it's a simple reality. Look at verse 23: "For the husband is the head [or the leader] of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church..." You see, that doesn't mean that women are second-class, just as within the Trinity there is full equality, and yet, there is an order because that's how God is. He's a God of order. There is an order of authority and submission within the Trinity; the Son eternally submits Himself to the Father, even so within our marriages, God has established a certain order. This is just the reality. What that means practically, men, is that we are appointed by God to be the leaders in our marriages and homes. We are leading; you are leading.

We may be good leaders, we may be bad leaders, we may be active leaders who clearly are leading and our wives see that lead, or we may those who have passively sort of abdicated that responsibility and stepped away from that responsibility of being a leader. But in the sight of God, regardless, you are the leader in your home, and God holds us responsible for how we lead. So, in Ephesians 5, then, we learn what that leadership is to look like, what godly leadership toward our wives should look like. Now those of you who are part of our church, you know that it's a struggle for me to get through a verse or two in the time we have. We are going to cover eight today, so buckle up, here we go.

First of all, Paul begins with Christ's primary command to husbands. Men, we have one basic responsibility in marriage. Look at it in verse 25, "Husbands, love your wives...." Husbands, love your wives. That's Christ's primary command to you. Notice, first of all, that it's an imperative. It is simply a command from Jesus Christ our Lord through His apostle. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ and you are a husband, this is what Christ expects from you. This is His primary command to you: love your wife. Now, there're several implications of that command that I want to draw out for you.

First of all, it means that no Christian husband is exempt from this directive for any reason. You know, I have interacted through the years with the husbands who struggle with this, and I've heard lots of excuses. Things like this, "You know Tom, I know that's what the Bible says," and that's always a bad place to start, "I know that's what the Bible says, but you don't know my wife." No, I don't know your wife but God does, and He says love your wife.

"Well, Tom, she's just not the same woman I married." Really? Who is she? Of course she's the same woman you married. She may have changed but you've changed as well, that doesn't remove your responsibility.

"Well, I'm not going to love her because she doesn't submit to me, and that's what the Scripture says, she's supposed to submit to me." There's no caveat like that in this text. "Well, I just don't find her attractive anymore." Here's a favorite one, "She doesn't love me." Again, there's nothing in the white space here that gives you any exemptions, there are no acceptable excuses. This is an imperative from our Lord to every single one of us.

There's another implication of this basic command, and that is, if Christ has commanded you to do this, then you and I by the grace of God have the capacity to do this regardless of who it is we're married to. We have the capacity to love our wives by the grace of God. There's a third implication of this being an imperative or a command, and that is, that love, while it includes emotion, is not primarily an emotion, because this can be commanded: love your wife.

Love does not begin with emotion. It is not sustained by emotion. Listen carefully, love is an act of the will, it's a decision that you make. If you doubt that, think about those couples who decide to adopt. They go to adopt that child, and what do they do at that moment? They decide to love that child, it's a decision. It's a decision you made when you got married, and it's a decision you can still make.

You know, some men will say something like this, “Well, you know, I just don’t love her anymore.” As if it’s something beyond their control, as if it’s something that happened and they didn’t mean for it to happen. It just happened. Listen, you are commanded to love your wife, and you can do it, and it is a decision that you make. So, every husband, then, is commanded to constantly, the idea here in the Greek text is to be constantly loving your wife as a habit of life.

The Greek word, as you know, for love, is the word “agape.” Don’t make too much of that; if I had time I would show you that the two primary Greek words for love, “agape” and “phileo,” are basically synonyms, and they’re used synonymously. I could show you places where they’re used of heavenly love and of earthly love. In fact, those two Greek words are used a lot like our one English word for love. We use the word “love” in English to describe everything from loving a football team, to loving ice cream, to loving our wives, to loving our children, to loving God. Same word.

You see, in Greek and in English, the context informs us as to the exact nature of the love. And in this context, it’s the example of Jesus Christ. Paul says, “Love your wives.” This is Christ’s primary command to us, men. Love them.

You say, “Well, what does that look like? OK, I hear you, but what am I supposed to do?” Well, the Scripture’s so practical, and in the following verses Paul illustrates the love that Christian husbands should manifest toward their wives. And he does so in two pictures, two pictures of what our love for our wives should look like. The first picture begins in the middle of verse 25 and runs down through verse 27. It is Christ’s treatment of the church, Christ’s treatment of the church, and Paul identifies in this picture two qualities of Jesus’ love for the church that you and I are to copy in our love for our wives.

First of all, he says that our love for our wives must be a sacrificial love. Verse 25, “Husbands, love your wives just as [Here’s the picture of what that love is to look like.] just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” Paul tells us that Christ loved the church so much that He sacrificed Himself for her. He gave Himself up for her. Look earlier in chapter 5 at verse 1, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love,” [here’s the picture again] “just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us,” [what do you mean Paul, when did He do that? Well, it’s when He gave Himself as] “an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” It’s the sacrifice He made at the cross, He gave Himself up; He sacrificed His life for His bride.

If you and I are to follow Christ's example, we must be willing, this is the point, to sacrifice ourselves even to the point of sacrificing our very lives for them. Now, if you're feeling pretty smug about this time, thinking, you know, "It's a relief I'll probably never be asked to that." Don't get too smug yet, because this means that we must also be willing to make the small daily sacrifices for them that are the lesser of giving our lives for them. You know, as one woman said to her husband, "You know honey, I know you'd die for me. You've told me that many times, but in the meantime, would you mind taking out the trash?"

That's the idea. If you're willing to do the greater, you're willing to do the lesser. John MacArthur writes,

"If a loving husband is willing to sacrifice his life for his wife, he is certainly willing to make lesser sacrifices for her. He puts his own likes, desires, opinions, preferences, and welfare aside, if that is required, in order to please her and to meet her needs. He dies to self in order to live for his wife because that is what Christ's kind of love demands."

This is what Christ did. Men, we are the leaders in our marriages, but our leadership isn't about exerting our rights, our authority, our likes, our preferences, it's about service. It's about giving up our lives for her. This is what Christ did. Do you remember what He said in Mark 10:45? He said, "... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...."

Think about that, Jesus came to serve you and to serve me, and if we're going to have the right kind of love, Christ's love, for our wives, we must not come to be served, but to serve. Let me ask you and let's just be honest, we all have some serious soul-searching to do here, myself as well. Does your wife think of you as someone who sacrificially, unselfishly serves her? Is that how your wife thinks of you? That's the example Christ set.

Do you intentionally put her interests, her desires, her needs before your own? For example, when you get home from work, you're tired, you just want to sit in your favorite chair, you just want to read the paper, watch SportsCenter, but your wife, that dreaded word, wants to talk. Or she needs help with dinner or with the kids, or she wants to go out to eat, and here's an even worse word, and then go shopping. And she wants you to go with her because she enjoys your company. You have to choose, am I going to serve myself, am I going to care about my preferences, and my wants and my needs, or am I going to be like Christ and serve my bride?

Do you really listen and talk to your wife? A lot of guys think communication is something for women. I wish I had time to show you the relationship between the Trinity. If you study how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit communicate with one another, there is deep and profound communication., That's what relationship is. It's not something for women; don't you dare slur God that way. It is relationship. Do you really listen to and talk to your wife? Do know what makes your wife feel loved, and do you do it?

You know, I'm the kind of person that just enjoys being with my wife. Sheila could tell you that our whole relationship, for 30 years, I've said to her, "You know, there's just nobody I'd rather be with."

And for me that sort of defines what love and relationship's all about. For me, I can be happy if we go to the Home Depot together, you know? What's better than walking down the tool aisle at Home Depot, hand in hand? I'm a little thick, a little slow to learn, but I have learned through almost 30 years of marriage that Sheila doesn't find that particularly satisfying. She feels especially loved when we sit down together, across from each other, or hand in hand taking a walk, and we talk. We talk about what's going on in our lives, we talk about our family, we talk about what we're learning, we talk about goals, we talk about fears, we talk about plans.

So, in any given day, I can choose either selfishly to do what I'm comfortable with, what would be my first choice, just being together. Or I can make a conscious choice to love my wife by doing the very thing I know that makes her most feel loved. We have to sacrifice ourselves, that's the point.

But don't miss Paul's big point here. The standard of our love is to be nothing less than the cross. Our Lord loved His bride when she hated Him, when she was His enemy. We are to love our wives sacrificially, regardless of how loveable they are, or how submissive they are, or whether they love us in return, whether they're young or old, whether they're homely or beautiful, whether they're slow or intelligent, whether they're responsive, or whether they're cold as ice. And we are to do it every day our entire lives, because that is the standard Jesus set for us. We're to sacrifice.

The second quality of Jesus' love for the church that we're to copy in our love for our wives must be a sanctifying love, a sanctifying love. Verse 26, "... so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word." Now, follow the flow of Paul's thought. Notice verse 25, you have the cross, you have Jesus dying for our sins on the cross.

Then in verse 26, “He ... cleansed the church by the washing of water with the word.” What’s that? That’s the spiritual cleansing, Christian, that occurred at the moment you believed. At the moment of your salvation, the Holy Spirit, using the Word, gave your soul a bath. That’s the idea. And what was His purpose?

Verse 26 goes on to say, “... that He might sanctify her.” Having cleansed us at the moment of salvation, He then sets out to sanctify us. And what strikes me about this was Christ’s purpose in giving Himself for us. He gave Himself for us, so that He might sanctify us, having cleansed us by the washing of water with the Word.

In other words, Jesus didn’t just give Himself in death for the forgiveness of your sins. His aim was much greater, much higher. He did it so that He could make you holy, in other words, so that you would be like Him, so that you would have His moral character. Why does He want us to be like that? Why does He want us to be holy? Look at verse 27, “... that [literally: “so that” or “in order that.” Here’s why He wants to make us more and more holy, so] “that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory....” This is a beautiful picture.

The picture is of the church as the bride of Christ, as a beautiful young bride, dressed in these wedding garments and beautiful jewelry, having no spot. That is, there’s no stain, there’s no blemish, or wrinkle, there’s no pucker or fold of skin, no sign of aging, or any such thing, nothing that would be any imperfection. Jesus is here talking through the Apostle Paul about spiritual beauty. So, he finishes verse 27 by leaving those metaphors of a bride and speaking very plainly.

Notice what he says at the end of verse 27, [to] “... be holy and blameless.” Holy, to be morally pure, like God is morally pure, blameless, to lack all moral imperfections, that’s Christ goal for you. And Christ will not be satisfied until you awake in His likeness. He’s making you like Himself. All of the joys of this life, the troubles and the trials of this life, He’s weaving together in order to make your character more like His moral character so that He can, notice, “present to Himself.” This is the presentation that happens when Christ returns, He presents to Himself a perfected bride, radiantly beautiful, character just like His.

Now, here’s Paul point relative to our marriage, men. Our greatest concern for our wife must be the same as Jesus’ concern for the church. Our greatest concern must be for her spiritual well-being. Your greatest concern, husband, for your wife should be that she’s a Christian. Do you pray for your wife to that end? Do you live a consistent Christian life before her that makes the

gospel attractive? And if your wife's already a believer, your next greatest concern should be her spiritual progress, that she manifest growing moral likeness to Jesus Christ.

You say, "Well, how can I do that? How can I demonstrate sanctifying love to my wife?" You know where it starts? It starts by your pursuing sanctification yourself. You can't lead her where you haven't been. Does your wife know that you spend regular time in God's Word and prayer because spiritual things matter to you? Does your wife see you trying to change your own life, your own attitudes, your own actions out of obedience to the Scripture? It starts with your own sanctification.

How else can you manifest sanctifying love? Do nothing that would expose her to sin and temptation. What influences do you bring into your family and into your home through entertainment and all that's involved with that? Don't do anything that would expose her to sin and temptation. Another way you could expose her to sin and temptation is by being authoritative and dictator-like in your home and causing her to sin by her anger and being provoked to anger by your behavior.

We must be, men, the spiritual leaders of our homes. Husbands, we ought to be the ones who put the priority on the Sunday corporate worship, our wives shouldn't have to be dragging us to church. We ought to be the ones who are making a regular time with our wives and family for brief study of God's Word and prayer. We ought to be doing that.

Now, I know the moment I say that, some guys get cold sweats because they just say, "I don't know what to do or how to do that." Well, let me tell you, you ought to get a little booklet, and the bookstore may be out because I didn't warn them. But they'll have it next week; you can get it on Amazon, a little booklet by Don Whitney entitled, Family Worship. It's just a little booklet, very practical, it's not rocket science. You can do this. But you need to lead because what happens when men don't lead?

Tragically, in many Christian homes, the wife is the spiritual leader, and when that's true what happens? What message do the children get, especially what message do the boys get? That Christianity, religion, and spiritual activities, they're fine for women, but not for men. Listen, if your boys grow up with that impression, that is a slur you have placed on the manliness of Jesus Christ. Because I promise you, He is far more of a man than you are, and this was His priority. Our love for our wives must be a sanctifying love. Is your wife more like Jesus because she's married to you?

Now, let's move to the second picture that Paul gives us. Not only is there this picture of Christ's treatment of the church, but there's a second picture and that is our treatment of our bodies. In verses 28 to 30 we see this picture. Look at verse 28, "So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies...." [Now, why does Paul change pictures? In one sense, of course, he doesn't, he's going to say we're part of Christ's body, and therefore it's a perfect illustration. But there's another sense in which he is changing pictures and I think that's because we have trouble grasping what Christ's love for the church is like, but we get what it's like to love our bodies. We understand this. Verse 28 says,] "husbands ought." The Greek word literally could be translated, "husbands are morally obligated to love their wives as their own bodies, he who loves his own wife loves himself."

Paul says, "Listen, we naturally love ourselves, men, and one way that we manifest that love is by how we care for our bodies." [So, if you understand that your wife is a part of you, then it's as reasonable to care for her as it is to care for a member of your own body, and in fact it's irrational not to,] Verse 29 says, "... for no one ever hated his own flesh...." No person in a rational state of mind hates and refuses to care for his own body.

In my backyard I have several live oaks, and I love trees, I love live oaks. But there's one of them that has this problem. It shoots these sprouts off of all of the roots, like hundreds of sprouts off the roots. And so, we spend our lives sort of going beneath the surface there and pulling these shoots off the roots of my live oak, and it happens all the time.

One Saturday several years ago, I was out there and in a hurry and needed to do this, and I was grabbing those little shoots and throwing them in the trash and wasn't paying a lot of attention to what was going on. And I finished, and I looked down at my thumb, and because I had not worn gloves, I noticed I had a blister. But not only did I have a blister, I had worked long enough and hard enough that about a dime size piece of skin on the tip of my thumb there was hanging loose.

And, you know, that begins to hurt. For a little tiny wound it can hurt and be quite distracting. And so, for about a week I bandaged the thing and put ointments on it, and all of those things that are distracting that I'd rather not deal with, and finally it healed. But imagine for a moment that instead of caring for that thumb in the way that I did, you overheard me after that accident occurred talking to my finger like this, "I am just fed up with your not doing your part around here. I am sick and tired of your whining and your complaining, and after all I've done to provide for you, and put a roof over your head, what is in this relationship for me? I'm the one

that's always putting out, I'm the one always making the sacrifices, you are just pathetic, I hate you, I wish you'd just go away."

Well, that's ridiculous. That would never happen. Paul's point, men, is it is just as ludicrous for us to think about or to treat our wives in that way. Charles Hodge 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. He may wish it were handsomer [I understand that] healthier, stronger, or more active, still it is his body, it is himself and he nourishes and cherishes it as tenderly as though it were the best and loveliest a man ever had. 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 both the laws of nature as well as the laws of God."

John Calvin's even more direct. Listen to Calvin,

"Every man by his very nature loves himself. But no man can love himself without loving his wife. Therefore, the man who does not love his wife is a monster."

In this picture of the treatment of our bodies, Paul provides us with two more practical qualities of how we should love our wives. Not only should our love for our wife be a sanctifying love, not only should it be a sacrificial love, but it should also be a nourishing love.

Look at verse 28, "So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies..." Verse 29, "for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes ... [it]." Paul says we naturally nourish our bodies and therefore we should nourish our wives as well. Now, what does this mean? The Greek word, "nourish," means "to feed, or to provide for," that's what the word itself means. We are to love our wives by providing for their physical needs. Just as we provide for the needs of our own bodies, we are responsible to provide for our wife's physical needs.

Now, what are those needs? Well, they're the same needs that we have but the Old Testament law is very specific. In Exodus 21 God outlines three very specific physical needs that men are to

meet in reference to their wives. They're to meet their need for food, their need for clothing, and physical intimacy in marriage.

But let's go to the New Testament. Turn back to 1 Corinthians 7 where we started this morning. Paul begins by talking about, the end of verse 2, each man is to have his own wife and each woman's to have her own husband, talking about the physical relationship, the sexual relationship in marriage. Verse 3, "The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife ...," the end of verse 4, "... the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time ..." Men, we owe our wives the physical intimacy that's a part of marriage. You don't have a right to withhold that because you're angry, because you're upset, or some sort of punishment. It is our responsibility to our wives. But 1 Timothy 5 talks about all the physical and material needs of this life.

Turn over to 1 Timothy 5. In the context here, Paul's talking about widows and the care for widows, but he makes this statement in verse 4 of 1 Timothy 5, "... if any widow has children or grandchildren, they [that is, the children or grandchildren] must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents...." [In other words, if you have aging parents and grandparents, you're responsible to help care for them. Notice verse 4 says,] "... this is acceptable in the sight of God."

But now skip down to verse 8, "... if anyone does not provide for his own ..." [And here of course the primary application is if you're not caring for your parents, you're not caring for your grandparents] "and especially for those of his household...." In other words, those who live under your roof, those who are your dependents, and now you see where a proper application of this is our wives. If you fail to meet the material needs of your wife then you have denied the faith, Paul says, and you're worse than an unbeliever, because even unbelievers meet the needs of their spouses. And so, we have a responsibility, men. Scripture demands that we provide for all of the physical needs of our wives.

How we violate this? Well, let me just give you a couple of things to consider. I think we sin against God and against our wives when we are lazy and fail to work hard in order to provide sufficiently for them. I think we break this command when we accumulate debt to fund our own selfish lifestyles and essentially steal from their future. I think we break this command when we're miserly in what we give them to live on. You know, there're some husbands who dole out money to their wives like they were their slaves.

What about how God is generous with us? We're to be generous with people including our wives. We're, I think, guilty of breaking this command of our Lord when we force our wives to work simply to fund the lifestyle we want, but we can't afford, and we don't need. Men violate this command when they neglect physical intimacy with their wives in exchange for a digital image on a computer screen. We owe our wives to meet their physical needs, to love them with a nourishing love.

Paul goes on to say our love for our wives should also be a cherishing love. Look at verse 29, "... for no one ever hated his own flesh, but ... cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church..." That word "cherish" is a beautiful word. It literally means "to heat, or to keep warm." It means to treat with tenderness. In fact, the only other time this Greek word occurs in the New Testament, it occurs in 1 Thessalonians 2:-7 where it's used of a nursing mother's care for her newborn. You get the idea. Tender, delighting in, caring for This is the attitude, men with which we are to approach our responsibility toward our wives.

Paul's point is, we treat our bodies like this, don't we? We are tenderly caring for our bodies all the time. Think about the time you spend every day tenderly caring for your body, from eating, to sleeping, showering, shaving, and, of course, the older you get applying more creams and gels and potions and lotions. If you want a real education in how men tenderly care for their bodies, just go to the gym and watch. Better yet, watch men watching themselves in the mirror at the gym.

Our responsibility for our wives doesn't end with providing for them, men. We are supposed to cherish them and to care for them with the same tender affection we show our own bodies, or the affection and the tenderness that a nursing mother shows her newborn. We fail to cherish our wives, and we sin against them when we neglect them. You know, a lot of men neglect their wives for their careers, for their work. They neglect their wives for sports and hobbies, for video games, for male friends. We fail to cherish our wives when we get angry with them.

You know, there are two kinds of anger in the New Testament, two different Greek words, actually. One of them is the clamming up kind of anger, this is the, "I'm mad so I'm not going to speak to you for three days kind of anger." And then there's the blowing up kind of anger, where, like at a volcano, it just erupts.

Both of those are sinful anger. and when we display anger to our wives in either of those ways, we are not cherishing them. We are not loving them. When we use our words to hurt them - some men use their tongues like swords to slice their wives up, with ridicule they belittle them,

they abuse them with their words. Paul says instead we are to cherish them, treat them with tenderness as we do our own bodies. Why? Because this is how Christ treats us.

I love this, look back at Ephesians 5:29, "... just as Christ also *does* the church..." Look at the change in verse 30, we [individually] "are members of [Christ's] ... body." [Every Christian, separately, is a member of the body of Christ. You want to know, Christian, how Jesus thinks of you, how He treats you? He cherishes you. He treats you with the same tenderness that a newborn baby is treated by its mother. There is a genuine care and tenderness toward you and that's to be true of us toward our wives.

Let me ask you, do you cherish your wife? Do you treat her with that tender, fond affection, that gentleness? You know, a lot of guys treat their wives like they're their opposing linebacker on the other team. Sadly, even unbelievers, some unbelievers get this.

I've just finished reading the three volumes of William Manchester's biography on Winston Churchill, some 3,500 pages on one of the leading men in the last century. And I love many stories from his life. One of them stands out to me in this context. He was a man who loved his wife and understood what it was to cherish her, to treat her with tenderness. One time they were at a party in London and as sort of a conversation starter, they said we're going to go around the room, and every person is going to answer this question: If you couldn't be yourself, what other person in human history would you be? That's a pretty interesting conversation starter, and why, of course.

And so, they're sort of going around the room, but everyone there was waiting with bated breath because Sir Winston Churchill was there, the prime minister. They were waiting to see what Churchill would say. And Churchill stood up and he began in the way he often did and sort of took it on himself to say, "If I could not be myself, then," and he paused with that dramatic pause that was so much a part of his speaking patterns, and he reached down, and he grabbed his wife Clementine's hand, and he said, "I should most like to be Lady Churchill's second husband," and sat down. He got it; he understood how to cherish his wife even though he was not a believer.

Men, we are demanded by Christ to cherish our wives. Our love for our wife is to be self-sacrificing; we are to put her needs above our own. What needs? Her spiritual needs, we're to look out for her in a sanctifying way, her physical needs, we're to nourish her. And with what attitude are we to meet those needs? It's to be cherishing, the same spirit of gentleness and

eagerness that a nursing mother has toward her newborn. Men, this is a hard lesson, hard for you to hear, hard for me to teach.

How do you know whether or not you are doing this? Well, let me propose that you do something, and I've taken this step myself. I told Sheila this week I wanted her to listen to this message, and I wanted to ask her this week, where am I doing o.k. and where do I need to work? What changes do I need to make to love you like Christ loved the church? Men, ask your wives. She knows. Wives, be gentle, be kind, if he comes and asks that question. Ask your wife. Let me also encourage guys, read a good book, read Stuart Scott's book, *The Exemplary Husband*, where you learn what it's like to be a Christian husband, as opposed to just the husband like everybody else.

So, we've seen Christ's primary command to husbands, we've seen two pictures of our love. Paul finishes this text, very briefly, with two reasons for our love, verses 31 and 32. Why is this so important? Well, Paul mentions two reasons. First of all, because it's in keeping with the original design of marriage, verse 31. He quotes from Genesis 2, "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."

In Hebrew, in Genesis 2, the word "join" literally means "to be glued to." God intends that marriage be life's supreme, (you leave father and mother), permanent, (you're glued), relationship. A man and a woman remain distinct in marriage, you're still two people, but you are inseparably joined body and soul to each other, so that to remove one of you is to damage both. We are to love our wives because it's part of the original design God had for marriage.

But Paul offers a second reason in verse 32 that's even more profound. The ultimate goal of marriage, the ultimate goal of marriage means we should love our wives. Look at verse 32, "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church." Now, obviously, Paul means that human marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and us. We get that, but what we don't get is how it got to be that. You know what most Christians think? They think Paul was sitting around the jail cell someday trying to figure out what would be a good picture of Christ's relationship to the church, and he had this sort of eureka moment. I've got it! Marriage, of course!

That's not how it happened, that's absolutely backward. You see, in eternity past God decided to save sinners through the work of His Son. And then He decided to create marriage to put a living

illustration around us of what that relationship could be. God created marriage not only because it was not good for man to be alone, but also as a powerful illustration of the relationship that believers have with His Son.

Guys, get this in your head: your marriage does not exist primarily for your needs to be met. Marriage exists to be a living illustration of Christ and the church, and like it or not, your marriage is illustrating the relationship between Christ and the church. You see, our marriages are the lenses through which the glory of Christ and the gospel shine out. In fact, let me say this to you men, today - today our marriages are teaching something about Christ. How you treat your wife today is saying something about Jesus Christ. Here's how one author put it:

“Every marriage, everywhere in the world, is a picture of Christ and the church. Because of sin and rebellion, many of these pictures are slanderous lies about Christ. But a husband can never stop talking about Christ and the church. If he's obedient to God, he's preaching the truth. If he does not love his wife, he's speaking lies, but he's always speaking. If he deserts his wife, he is saying that this is the way Christ deserts His bride – a lie. If he's harsh with his wife, he's saying that Christ is harsh with the church – another lie. If he sleeps with another woman he's an adulterer and a blasphemer. How could Christ love someone other than His own bride? It is astonishing how, for a few moments of pleasure, faithless men can bring themselves to slander the faithfulness of Christ in such a way.”

Our marriages are the lenses through which the world sees our Lord. When our marriages are right, they project the light of the gospel to those around us, but when our marriages are not what Christ commanded, then the light is obscured. We lie about Jesus Christ if we don't treat our wives with love. Men, may God help us to keep the lens clean.

Let's pray together.

Father, this is a very convicting passage for all of us who are husbands. We pray for Your forgiveness where we have failed You in what marriage is supposed to be and what we are supposed to be. Forgive us, Father, but help us today to resolve with new strength to pursue obedience in this area, to love our wives with a sacrifice that's like Christ's sacrifice, with a desire for their sanctification, for their spiritual progress.

May we love them with a nourishing love that longs to generously and overwhelmingly meet their needs physically. And may we do so with that cherishing tenderness of a nursing mother for her newborn.

Father, forgive us for our failures. Make us more like Christ in this way as well, and may our lives and our marriages be the lens through which the world sees the love of Christ for His bride.

I pray for those here this morning who don't know Christ. May this passage and His sacrifice draw them to Him even this day, in faith and repentance.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.