
Ephesians

To Be a Husband (5:25-33)

After instructing wives to be submissive to their husbands (5:22), Paul addressed the husbands, encouraging them to love their wives and meet their needs. What exactly does a wife need? Consider this answer:

What is it that most women want in relationships with men? Equal opportunity in the workplace? Dignity in the home? Hardly anyone in the western world at the end of the twentieth century would suggest that it ought to be otherwise. . . . Yet for many women, the more firmly entrenched women's rights and opportunities have become, the more their desire for fulfillment in the workplace and in the home has eluded them. Careers often fail to satisfy. Marriage and home life is not all that it was made out to be. Whatever their day-to-day relationships with men, many women sense that something significant, something basic, is missing in their lives.

If asked, few women—indeed, few men—could put their finger on the problem. We are all so terribly liberated in the 90's—and so very secular in our thinking. . . . Who would ever guess that what most women want, but only few women find, is male spiritual leadership?¹

Ephesians 5:25-33 does not contain the specific words “male spiritual leadership,” but that is what Paul was addressing in this passage. As the wife shows submission to the Lord by following the leadership of her husband, the husband shows submission to the Lord when he exercises his leadership appropriately.

¹F. LaGard Smith, *What Most Women Want: What Few Women Find* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1992), 7-8.

A husband leads correctly when he takes seriously this command: “Husbands, love your wives” (5:25a). This mandate defines male spiritual leadership. It has to do with loving service and tender care rather than just getting to be “the boss.”

Read Paul's instructions to husbands:

Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ's love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They're really doing themselves a favor—since they're already “one” in marriage.

No one abuses his own body, does he? No, he feeds and pampers it. That's how Christ treats us, the church, since we are part of his body. And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become “one flesh.” This is a huge mystery, and I don't pretend to understand it all. What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church. And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband (5:25-33; TM).

Paul's words teach this basic truth: *A husband shows that he takes Christ seriously when he uses his leadership to care tenderly for his wife.*

WITNESSING TENDER CARE

What does it mean to be a husband? It means being a loving leader. Verse 25 says, “Husbands,

love your wives, . . .” It sounds simple, does it not? What complicates matters is the way we misuse the word “love” today. “Love” often comes with strings attached: To some, love is treating her well as long as she is young and beautiful. To others, it means being good to her as long as she is good to you, being nice to her for the sake of the children, or providing for her in exchange for her efforts to keep the house and rear children.

Paul did not give us room to attach whatever definition we like to the notion of love. Paul offered two analogies to help us understand what he had in mind.

Paul’s first comparison says plainly, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (5:25). The prototype for the relationship that husbands and wives should have is found in Christ and His church. That is a powerful comparison! Throughout Ephesians Paul stressed the vital union between Christ and the church. Christ is the exalted head of the church (1:22; 4:15). Christ loves and has given Himself for His church (3:19; 5:2). Christ brought the church salvation by His own death (1:7, 13; 2:5, 6; 2:14–18). He cares for the needs and the growth of His church (4:11–16), and He dwells in the hearts of those who belong to His church (3:17). Christ also provides for the growth and well-being of His church (4:15, 16).

Paul had said all of this. Now, in chapter 5, Paul held up the incredible relationship between Christ and His church as a model for the quality of love that a husband should have for his wife. That Paul dared to use such a comparison indicates how serious he was about the way I relate to my wife and how you see your relationship with your wife.

In chapter 5 Paul presented the unfolding stages of Christ’s commitment of love to the church. It gives us a feel for the *comprehensiveness* of Christ’s love.

First, Christ loved the church. This takes us back to eternity past. Before creation, Christ already loved His church. Even when the church was only a thought in the mind of God, Christ loved her.

Second, Christ gave Himself up for her. He gave up heaven, came to earth, became a man, and died to bring the church to life. He held

back nothing. He gave His all.

Third, Christ provided for her cleansing by the washing of water through the Word. Paul knew about this from firsthand experience. As a sinner, before he belonged to Christ’s church, he had been told what he needed to do to be saved and be added to the church. He had heard these words: “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16). Part of what sets churches of Christ apart from many denominations is this belief: As a person comes by faith in the Word of God to be baptized in water, that person is spiritually cleansed, not by the physical water, but by the power of Christ. Christ cleanses His church.

Fourth, Christ shows His love for the church in His efforts to make her holy. The tense of this verb sums up everything Christ is trying to do. He wants to make His church holy in character and conduct: “Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her” (5:27; TM).

Finally, Christ loves the church, and at the end of the age He will take her to Himself as a radiant church. The Greek word for “radiant,” *endoxos*, literally means “glorious.” “Glory” in the Scriptures refers to the shining, visible radiance of the character of God. One day Christ’s love will bring His church to the point of radiant, godly beauty. John, another apostle, gave us a glimpse of what it will be like:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:1, 2).

Trying to grasp the love of Christ for His church is beyond us. We would have an easier time computing the exact number of grains of sand on all the beaches in all the world than we would computing a measure of the true love that Christ has for His church. His love stretches from eternity past to the present, and on to eternity future.

What do we do with this incomprehensible love? Husbands, we must let it bring us to our knees. We must let it eliminate the ugly pride that keeps our marriages from being what God wants them to be. We must let it end the selfishness that keeps us from being servants to our wives.

Christ shows me that what my wife needs is a servant-leader. She needs someone who loves her, who gives rather than always taking, who seeks to bring out the best in her, and who wants her to become what God has in mind for her as His child.

EXPERIENCING TENDER CARE

Paul offered a second analogy to help us understand the love we should have for our wives. It comes from our own personal experience: "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" (5:28, 29a). If there is anything I understand, it is taking care of myself. When I get hungry, I feed myself. When I get tired, I rest. When I hurt, I do what I can to ease the pain.

Marriage is wonderful because—since the two of us are one flesh—as I love my wife, I express love to myself as well. My care for her is care for me also.

What, then, should we do for our wives? This list might get us started. Husbands should do the following:

- Give your time . . . she is your number one priority;
- Give your presence . . . both your physical and emotional presence;
- Give truth . . . take spiritual leadership in the home, making sure your wife and family are learning the truth;
- Give your love . . . to meet her needs;
- Give your prayers . . . to the Father for her tender care;
- Give your forgiveness . . . to restore the relationship;
- Give your leadership . . . for the home and family;
- Give your inheritance . . . sharing all that is yours with her.²

PRACTICING TENDER CARE

The word of God to wives is "submit" (5:22). The word of God to husbands is "love" (5:25). Men, let me make this practical. Consider the love you have for your wife. Rate yourself from 1 to 10, with 1 being "I am very weak in this area" and 10 being "I am very strong when it comes to this."

²Max Anders, *The Good Life: Living With Meaning in a "Never-Enough" World* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 191.

- _____ "I never give up on my wife."
- _____ "I care more for my wife than I do for myself."
- _____ "I never expect more from her than what she has to give."
- _____ "I never demand to be the 'boss' around the house."
- _____ "My pride never causes problems in my marriage."
- _____ "I do not force her to do things my way."
- _____ "I do not practice 'me first' with her."
- _____ "I never 'fly off the handle' at her."
- _____ "I do not count her faults."
- _____ "I am forgiving when she is wrong."
- _____ "I take great pleasure in seeing her grow spiritually."
- _____ "I will bear with her through anything."
- _____ "I will trust God's plan for her life."
- _____ "I will always think the best of her."
- _____ "I will never regret the commitment I made to her."
- _____ "I will keep my commitment to help her to be all that God wants her to be."
- _____ "My love for her will never die."

CONCLUSION

Husbands, God does not expect you to be perfect, but He does expect you to give your all to show the love and tender care your wife needs from you.

Look to Jesus. He is ready to help you. Why not take a moment and recommit yourself to being the husband God wants you to be? God will keep His promise to strengthen and help you.

"Husbands, love your wives, . . ."



Marriage

"The closer a man and his wife get to Christ, the clearer they see how important it is for them to stay close to each other."

Richard D. Dobbins

Henry Ford was asked on the occasion of his fiftieth wedding anniversary, "What is the formula for a good marriage?" He replied, "The same as for a successful car; stick to one model."

"A young man prayed, 'Lord, give me a wife that loves Thee—for then I know she will love me.'"