

Husbands: A Call to Love Like Jesus – Part 1

Ephesians 5:25-33

The most critical need of the church at this moment is men, bold men, free men. The church must seek, in prayer and much humility, the coming again of men made of the stuff of which prophets and martyrs are made.

AW Tozer

Introduction: In 1953, Jim and Elisabeth Elliot were married in the city of Quito, Ecuador. A few years before the couple met at Wheaton College where both pursued their passion for Christ and missions, culminating in each individually serving the Quichua Indians in Ecuador, seeking to bring the good news of the gospel to them. In 1956, Jim was speared to death by those he lovingly sought to reach, along with four other missionaries, leaving Elisabeth with a 10 month old daughter. Elisabeth stayed and served the same people who killed her husband for the next two years, eventually returning in 1958 to live among them when her daughter was 3. Elisabeth (who died in 2015) was faithful, courageous, driven, passionate, capable, and strong. She was also a woman who believed and lived out God's Word, and who sought to be a supportive, encouraging, and submissive wife. Here is what Elisabeth said about the expectation of husbands in her book, *The Mark of a Man* (1981):

*"A man must at times be **hard as nails**: willing to face up to the truth about himself, and about the woman he loves, refusing compromise when compromise is wrong. But he must also be **tender**. No weapon will breach the armor of a woman's resentment like **tenderness**...The world cries for men who are **strong**; strong in conviction, strong to lead, to stand, to suffer."*

Elisabeth knew and modeled the Biblical reality that churches and families are strongest when marriages display the God given roles of marriage by faith, in redeemed transformation through the gospel, reversing the consequences of the Fall. Women who seek to encourage, support, and uplift their husbands in leadership, and men who are strong, courageous, and tender toward their wives. This is a far cry to what you will hear today in popular culture, where at best men are **confused** at what they are supposed to do, and at worst are called to be more like women, rather than functioning the way God intended. This confusion is NOT cultural but theological. *Why is it so hard for men to lead the way God intended? Why is Godly leadership so rare? Why do marriages so easily end in divorce or simply wallow in apathy, merely functioning as roommates and lacking the intimacy craved by all in marriage?*

To answer that question, we do not read modern literature but ancient. Returning once again to **Genesis 3**, we are informed why leading the way God intended is so difficult, and actually **impossible** without radical transformation in the gospel. Adam was called to lead his wife physically and spiritually, but when that was challenged, he failed. Eve was deceived by the Serpent, and Adam, who was with his wife (Gen. 3:6) failed to protect her, and instead participated in her sin. Eve was responsible for her sin, but Adam was responsible for both of their sin! He bore the weight of leadership as God condemned all of mankind based on **HIS SIN**, not Eve's (see Romans 5:12-14). As a result, men in particular were **marked by certain consequences of sin**. The task of **providing** was now difficult, with the ground being cursed and only through pain and sweat would it yield bread (Gen. 3:17-19). The task of **leading** was now difficult, as a wife's desire was now contrary to his leadership, set against him (Gen. 3:16). The opportunity for **fellowship** with God that he once enjoyed was now impossible as he now faced physical and spiritual death, being cast out of the Garden ((Gen. 3:23-24), needing the death of animals as a sacrifice to have access to God. Leading now was HARD, with ongoing implications to men today.

There are **two main, wrong ways** that men respond to the pressure and responsibility of leadership in marriage as a result of the Fall. 1) In the face of opposition from a wife, a man will attempt to rule (Gen. 3:16), asserting himself physically and domineeringly over her. This can also manifest verbally and emotionally, but men will work with what they have which is size and volume. 2) In the face of pressure and opposition, men will become **passive**, looking to leave situations, busy themselves in other things, and in far too many situations, will leave altogether. When men respond in either of these ways, it perpetuates a vicious cycle: He feels pressure and goes passive, a wife feels like she is not being cared for or listened to, lets him know that and tries to get him to step up, which pushes him further into passivity, so she shuts him out of physical intimacy, which leaves him wondering, wandering, and resentful, so he begins to act even worse to her out of hurt, which then.....Can you see how this can easily happen, can have lasting consequences, and leave couples not knowing how to get out of the cycle???!!!!

The next two Sunday's we will look at what God has called **husbands to**, which overlaps with God's call to wives, so that we will understand clearly what we are called to do. This is good for everyone, recognizing that some here are single and will be married someday, some who have been married and now are divorced, some in hard and loveless marriages currently, some who have lost a spouse, and some currently in growing marriages. This will help us counsel each other, pray for each other, uphold each other, and ultimately learn about Jesus' love for us. One of the best things this church can ever be marked by is faithful, strong, loving, and tender male leadership, and this is something everyone, including every woman here, should pray is being produced here, from the older to the younger. This morning we will begin to look at the **Mandate, Model, Mission, Motive, and Meaning** of being a husband in marriage, and the purpose of marriage itself.

Mandate to Husbands: Love (Eph. 5:25a)

"Husbands, love your wives..."

In the previous section, wives were called to *submit to their own husbands*, and we said that was a volitional command, one where a wife **willingly** (and joyfully) is called to place themselves under the headship of her husband (and her husband alone). Here, a husband is called to **love his wife** with the same volitional decision, willingly loving the wife with whom he has entered into a covenant relationship. It is important we understand this point: each of these commands, willingly exercised, **are NOT dependant on the other to fulfill**. In other words, a wife is to submit whether her husband loves her or not, and a husband loves his wife whether she supports or submits to him. **HOWEVER**, each mandate is far easier to fulfill when the other plays their role! But we cannot **MAKE** our spouse play their role. All we can *control* is our own response and obedience to the Lord. If we try to make our spouse do something against their will, it is called *manipulation*. This is why being equally yoked in marriage is the gateway for all marriage.

The command here is a **present active imperative**, which means that loving a wife is a continual venture, one that sets out to love over and over again. When a husband commits to love his wife at any marriage ceremony, he is truly committing to one choice that will dictate his next million choices. This love is the broadest and most unconditional kind of love, one that seeks the **highest good of the object of love**, meaning the goal of every Godly husband is the highest good of his wife. This transcends every marriage for all time, as we are called to love whether or not our wives live up to their end of the bargain or not. Its fascinating that *headship* is not mentioned here to husbands, but to wives as the foundation for submission. A husband is called to **love because of headship, but leadership is truly expressed in the foundational reality of love**.

Model for Husbands: Christ (Eph. 5:25b)*“as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her...”*

But how is love defined? And where do we look to for a model of love? In a perfect world, sons would simply look to their fathers for a picture of manliness and masculinity, seeing a man who is strong and tender, who treats his wife with both physical protection and emotional understanding. But as marriages have been attacked and few marriages following a Biblical model, examples are harder and harder to come by. However, that simply points us back to the ultimate model of love, and that is to **Jesus Himself, who gave husbands the perfect example to follow**. The foundation of Christ-like love is **sacrifice**, one who is willing to give up his own life for the object of his love. This means that the limit of effort and expenditure for a husband is *to the point of death*, since that is the length Christ went to love His Bride. To understand what is required in this sacrifice, let's start with how Peter counseled husbands in **1 Peter 3:7**:

*“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in **an understanding way, showing honor** to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered”*

Living with our wives in an *understanding way* while *showing honor* requires a husband to embrace *Christ-like sacrificial love*. This means husbands must submit to the loving duty of being sensitive to his wife's needs, feelings, and fears, subordinating his needs for hers. It means giving consideration in companionship while providing protection, provision and strength. Let's look at a few ways Jesus did this for us:

- A Husband Learns & Seeks to Understand** – One of the great truths of Scripture is that God became a man in order to fulfill all righteousness in the Law so that He could be the perfect sacrifice on our behalf, taking our place on the cross and giving us His righteousness (1 Cor. 5:17-21). However, in taking on full humanity, Jesus is our High Priest who **understands our weaknesses and temptations** (Heb. 4:14-16). He knows us, relates to us, and loves us as a great sympathizer. This has implications for husbands, who need to sacrifice their normal comfort and love a woman who is distinctly different than he is, including her needs and desires. Husbands should constantly be in school, gaining more and more degrees in *wifeology*, advancing to PHD like knowledge. This requires much **time, patience, and listening**. It means NOT simply playing the card of *“who can understand women, am I right??!!”*, but taking an ongoing, active care of our wives that ceases to treat her like a buddy but rather what she truly is, a precious, valuable, and honorable creation by God. **Is this easy?** Not at all, since our wives keep changing over time. But this was NOT unknown by God when He created marriage, but it was His design for it from the beginning. As a husband sacrifices his own needs and comfort to joyfully enter into intimate communion with his wife, she will feel a greater sense of **trust and safety** to follow him.
- A Husband Initiates** – While Israel was small and nothing, God called them to Himself (Deut. 8:6-11) While we sinners, Jesus died for us (Rom. 5:8). While the disciples were fishing, Jesus called them to follow Him. Jesus is the ultimate **initiator of love to those that are His**. This is far too often missing in husbands loving leadership of wives. To truly lead, it requires that one is providing something to follow. Wives were created by God to **respond**, and in the absence of true leadership, she will fill in that gap. A husband must love by initiating with his wife. This means a husband must be **thoughtful about the specific makeup and needs of his wife, must**

prayerfully consider the direction of the family, and initiate hard and needed conversations.

Notice that this goes against our natural passivity, working in the garage or overtime hoping that the issues will go away or somehow fix themselves.

One of the biggest issues in every marriage is **communication** and most often it means that there is a lack of it. Communication is hard, since our words are often heard differently than they are intended. This can be discouraging and de-motivating. However, one of the best things a husband can do is **initiate intentional time and space to talk, listen to, and hear his wife**. Life is busy, and it is far easier to NOT talk about things than to do so. This means that daily, weekly, monthly, and annually a husband should be thoughtful about how to carve out time simply to commune with his bride.

- **A Husband takes Responsibility** – The sacrifice of a husband culminates in the responsibility he takes for his wife. This should be a great source of comfort, rest, and trust for a wife. A husband is responsible not only for his own life and decisions, but also how those decisions affect his wife and children. If a decision negatively affects the family, the husband is the one who shoulders the burden of responsibility. I've often asked groups which role is harder: a husband who bears the weight of decisions or a wife who has to trust and support the decisions made! The answer: both are impossibly difficult without Christ. Remember, a husband must make decisions for his family, and we often do not know exactly what to do, since we must operate out of faith and trust. We know we're responsible, and we know that we'll have to answer for the decisions we make. But can I say this: *It is far easier to make a decision that is unpopular in my family when I know I have Erin's support!* I trust that even if the decision turns out poorly, she will not hold it against me, play the "I told you so" game, and will seek to support me in the next one. A wife can truly set her husband up to lead well when she supports him, and he loves well when he's willing to do the hard things and willingly bear responsibility.

Now, a question is posed at this point. If wives are to submit in everything and husbands are to sacrifice to the point of death, how are we supposed to make actual decisions? Who wins out? The answer to that question is answered in the next 2 verses, which may just radically change every husband's understanding of marriage this morning.

Mission for Husbands: Holiness (Eph. 5:26-27)

*"...that he might **sanctify her**, having cleansed her by the **washing of water with the word**, 27 so that he might **present the church to himself** in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, **that she might be holy** and without blemish."*

If you asked a typical husband in the church or outside of the church as to the **purpose** of his marriage and the goal of being a husband, I believe you'd be met with deer in headlight eyes and a meandering answer as words would come out seeking a solution along the way. Perhaps it would be to provide a house and money for the family. Maybe it would be to raise kids well. Or possibly the answer would simply be to have a happy, enjoyable life with another. Though there is truth in each of these, they fall short of the clear, Biblical answer for the purpose of a husband in marriage. This is exactly what is addressed by Paul next.

Notice in verses 26-27 there are three **"that's"** mentioned. Most often (but not always), when you see a **"that"** in Scripture it denotes *purpose or goal*, particularly when the word *iva* is used. Here we have **three purpose statements** of Christ's purpose for the church, which in turn gives a playbook for husbands in marriage:

- **Sanctify Her** – The goal Jesus has for us, His Bride: our sanctification, that we would be holy and set apart for Him. This is the stated goal back in **Ephesians 1:4**, “*even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be **holy and blameless before Him.***” We are a people for His own possession (Titus 2:14), and His desire is that we would live with Him forever, thus He is preparing us for that day as a pure Bride. *How does He do it?* He washes us through water with the Word. He washes us through His atoning work on the cross and by the knowledge of the gospel, the Word of faith. Holiness is the goal for the church, and He gave us the opportunity and resource to accomplish it.

Implication for husbands: This is the purpose and goal of your husbanding, to see your wife become more and more like Jesus and less and less like the world. Her holiness is more important than her temporal happiness, since holiness is the pathway to ultimate happiness. This colors and shapes every decision you make for your family. Does this decision help us and her to become more like Christ, to cling to this world less, and to reflect radical trust in Christ alone? Husbands can far too easily sue for peace in a marriage, giving into the temporal desires of their wife because they want to avoid conflict, only to see these decisions move wives AWAY from what they need the most. Husbands, your purpose is to help your wife be set apart, not conformed like everyone around her.

- **Present Her** – The next purpose statement is beautiful. Christ will present to **HIMSELF** the church one day, when He returns and reigns, and will present her in *splendor and purity*. This pictures the culture of the time where a bride to be would take a ceremonial bath before presenting herself to the groom and his family to demonstrate her purity. This also is pictured in **Ezekiel 16:8-14**, where God too Israel to Himself, made a vow and covenant with her, and made her beautiful and ready for royalty. “*Thus you were **adorned with gold and silver**, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. 14 And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the **splendor** that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God.*” Jesus will present the church to Himself in the splendor and beauty of holiness.

Implications for husbands: We all exist in momentary marriages, since there will only be one marriage in heaven, and that is the Bride (believers) with the Bridegroom (Christ) according to Matt. 22:30. We have been given the gift of a wife in this life, the **grace of life with a fellow heir**, but we will absolutely give our wives back to Christ one day. I believe the question that will be posed to husbands: *is the wife given to you, is she MORE LIKE JESUS as a result of your marriage?* That is an awesome responsibility, one that is impossible without the grace of God, but sets a clear purpose.

- **Purify Her** – She should move toward holiness and blamelessness.

Implications for husbands: We cannot lead someone where we ourselves do not go. This means that WE must be walking in holiness and purity in our minds, hearts, and actions. We must be pursuing Christ in His Word, and applying the truths we know every day. A man that tries to call others to action in ways that he himself is unwilling to do is the worst of hypocrites. We lead our wives and kids into the satisfying worth of Christ, not in the typical idolatry of the day. This takes hard work, discipline, and clear priorities in life. It means leading by example even before you call her to follow. It means exhausting yourself in what is most valuable, laboring to the point of exhaustion for the things that are lasting.

Motive for Husbands: Love (Eph. 5:28-30a)

"In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church..."

Meaning of Marriage: Christ (Eph. 5:30b-33)

*"...because we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 **This mystery is profound**, and I am saying that it refers to **Christ and the church**. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."*

*"A famous cigarette billboard pictures a curly-headed, bronze-faced, muscular macho with a cigarette hanging out the side of his mouth. The sign says, "Where a man belongs." That is a lie. Where a man belongs is at the bedside of his children, leading in devotion and prayer. Where a man belongs is leading his family to the house of God. Where a man belongs is up early and alone with God seeking vision and direction for the family" **John Piper**, *Desiring God**

What is the greatest need of the church and families? Men who will lead in love and sacrifice. Men who overcome their natural, fleshly ways by yielding themselves to Christ completely. Men who are strong and courageous, tough and tender, quick to set the pace and quicker to listen. Men, this is NOT impossible. You can do this, starting today, by committing to Christ, turning from your sin, and being filled with the Spirit. You are not alone. There are many around you to help. So, today, let's pray for our men, our husbands and fathers, that we would lead in the model of Christ, through sacrificial love that leads all of us to holiness, looking to the fact that one day we will be with Christ in full splendor.