

**Husbands: A Call to Love Like Jesus** – Part 2  
Ephesians 5:25-33

*“Marriage is meant by God to put the gospel reality on display in the world.”<sup>1</sup>*

**Introduction:** In 1962, the United States was in a precarious spot. In a post WW2 world of nuclear weaponry, fears between the USSR and the US were elevated, each distrusting the other while also trying to gain the upper hand in technology and superiority. In 1957, Sputnik 1 orbited the earth for 22 days, filling American citizens with dread as an unseen sphere sent its beeps back to earth. Then in 1961, Yuri Gagarin became the first man into space. The scoreboard was tilted, and the U.S was not used to being on the losing side of world competition.

On September 12, 1962, JFK gave one of his best known and arguably most effective speeches at Rice University, just over a year before his assassination. He challenged the U.S to put a man on the moon by 1970, an audacious and grandiose goal and vision. He appealed to mankind’s pioneering spirit, to face challenges head on, and did so in an inspirational way, hearkening all the way back to the founding of the country itself:

*“William Bradford, speaking in 1630 of the founding of the Plymouth Bay Colony, said that all great and honorable actions are accompanied with **great difficulties**, and both must be enterprised and overcome with answerable courage.*

He then reached a pinnacle of his speech to the delight and cheers of the crowd, some 40,000 listeners who caught the vision:

*“We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, **not because they are easy, but because they are hard**, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win.”*

On July 21, 1969, as Neal Armstrong descended to the surface of the gray dust of the moon, the vision hatched 7 years earlier was realized, with much money, ingenuity, and determination spent on the goal. It’s instructive to us that man can be motivated to do something hard when the stakes are only as high as the moon. We are geared to achieve, to strain, to look to what’s next. Reaching the moon is impressive, but it cannot hold a candle to being in a **healthy, Christ-centered, gospel driven, God glorifying marriage**. But it can also be argued that reaching the moon is a far easier venture.

If there is one takeaway for our men this morning is that being the husband God has called us to be is **IMPOSSIBLE** without the reality of the gospel and Christ in our lives. We saw that we do not naturally die to self, do not seek to serve and understand, and default to our own comfort and pleasure. But marriage provides an exceptional opportunity, a training ground, a living picture of our need and goal of life itself. John Piper, in his book *This Momentary Marriage* said this about the foundational reality of marriage:

*“The most foundational thing to see from the Bible about marriage is that it is God’s doing. And the ultimate thing to see from the Bible about marriage is that it is for God’s glory. Those are the two points I*

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<sup>1</sup> John & Noel Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*

*have to make. Most foundationally, marriage is the doing of God. And ultimately, marriage is the display of God.”*

As we continue this study in marriage and the roles of husbands and wives, we are again reminded of the depth of love of Jesus for us, His Bride, and how He died, bore, restored, forgave, and cleansed us, so that we could be pure and live with Him forever. Marriage provides a beautiful picture of Christ’s commitment to us, and we simply respond by grace to reflect that commitment to each other.

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

*“Husbands, love your wives...”*

Husbands are to **willingly, volitionally, and joyfully** love their wives. This is a choice a man makes in entering into a covenant relationship, and his one choice to love makes his next million choices to love, regardless of whether that love is returned or not.

### **Model for Husbands: Christ** (Eph. 5:25b)

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

Husbands look no further than Jesus Himself for a model of what love looks like and the extent that love plays out. The key word in loving like Jesus is **sacrifice**, willingly giving up comfort, selfishness, and any other thing in order to fully love a bride. In loving a wife in an *understanding way while showing honor to her as a precious, weaker vessel* (1 Pet. 3:7), a husband is willing to:

- **A Husband Learns & Seeks to Understand** – Differences are celebrated and are opportunities for learning and growth, not roadblocks to unity. To truly love a wife, a husband must take **time** to listen to, exercise patience with, and pursue his bride. He should provide a relationship where a wife knows she can trust him, where he truly cares for her, and knows she is valued with him.
- **A Husband Initiates** – Reversing the course of the Fall where Adam abdicated leadership to his wife in Genesis 3, a husband is to initiate, giving her something to respond to. He is willing to pursue her and work on the marriage, initiating time together, specific conversation, and the overall decision making of the family. He initiates because he ultimately takes on responsibility for himself, his wife, and entire family.
- **A Husband takes Responsibility** – This provides a source of comfort, rest, and trust for a wife. A husband views his wife as a gift from the hand of God, and bears the heavy but glorious weight of responsibility of not only physically providing for her, but for caring for her emotionally and spiritually. It is the spiritual responsibility that Paul addressed next:

### **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.”*

- **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. 5:28-30)

*“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, because we are members of his body.”*

After clarifying the mission, Paul turns to the **motive behind love**. There are **three levels** of motivation that Paul addresses, each having to do with applying the love one has for self to his wife. Each ramp up in depth and seriousness.

- **Love your wife as you love yourself** – This is not a complicated example, and is the same motivation as loving our neighbor (“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” – Matt. 22:39). Each person knows how to care for themselves, eating when hungry, making sure to groom, wash, clean clothes, etc. At one level, a husband is to love his wife by providing in the same way a man seeks to care for himself. But there is another ‘level’ of loving motivation.
- **Love your wife as you are “one flesh”** – In the verse to follow, we are reminded of the mandate of marriage in Genesis 2, where a husband will become **one flesh** with his wife, meaning where there were two before there is now one new entity. As a husband cares for himself, he is caring for his wife, since they are one. To lack loving care of a wife would be a type of suicide and demonstrate self-hate. To care for a wife is to care for oneself. But the point of this analogy is taken one step further, and it points to Christ and how He cares for His Body, which we are member of.
- **Love your wife just like Christ loved HIS BODY** – There are two specific ways that husbands are to love their wives the same way Christ does the church.

1) **Nourish/Nurture** - The idea of this word is captured in Ephesians 6:4 when it is used for the “bringing up” of children in discipline and instruction (which we’ll talk about next week). The idea is to provide whatever is needed for success, tailored to the unique needs of each wife. This provision is given with tender care. It requires **being present** and takes into account the physical, spiritual, and emotional/psychological needs. This means that nourishing ones wife **takes precedent and becomes a primary priority**. Providing financially is a part of the totality of provision, but it is NOT the only one. In fact, husbands and fathers must remember the same point: your wife and kids want and need YOU and your presence MORE THAN any amount of money you can bring in. Yes, stewarding work and finances are important, but men can often find it **easier** to work longer hours than working hard in the home. Often men find success, accolade, or feel appreciated more at work so it becomes an escape under the guise of care. Our work continues in our home as we seek to meet the real, sanctifying needs of our wives. A husband that chooses work over his wife has failed on both fronts. Nourishment is not simply cold provision, but is paired with this most important other part:

2) **Cherish/Comfort** – This literally means “to heat” and metaphorically means passion or to inflame, but also to *comfort, cherish, or warm*. This was also used in **1 Thess. 2:7** to refer to the care a nursing mother has for her own children. Here the idea of *tenderness and physical affection* is prominent, which is more or different than sexual interaction. This is a cherishing love, the kind that is found in real friendship, seeing a wife as more than one who raises kids, manages a home, or participates sexually. This is the development of intimacy that transcends physical attraction and goes beyond socio economic status. Physical attributes can wane in life and marriage, and economic standing can change quickly since it is ultimately out of our control, but cherishing a bride lasts. It notices and celebrates the unique, it upholds virtue, and moves in attraction toward Godly character. **Before looking at roadblocks to these two areas, let me ask this simple question to every husband here: how does your wife feel and know that she is cherished by you?** If you do not know, ask her today. If she doesn’t give you an answer, pray God would make this clear. But what are roadblocks to this? Let me give you two:

**Lack of feeling or affection** – *What do I do if I just don't FEEL that affectionate or have emotions to cherish my wife? What if they are gone or haven't ever been there?* Tim Keller had this to say about that in his book *"The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the wisdom of God."*

*"In any relationship, **there will be frightening spells** in which your feelings of love dry up. And when that happens you must remember that the essence of marriage is that it is a covenant, a commitment, a promise of future love. So what do you do? You do the acts of love, despite your lack of feeling. You may not feel tender, sympathetic, and eager to please, but in your actions you must BE tender, understanding, forgiving and helpful. And, if you do that, as time goes on you will not only get through the dry spells, but they will become less frequent and deep, and you will become more constant in your feelings. This is what can happen if you decide to love."*

Unfortunately, we can have *feelings* for Christ dry up at times, so having that with a spouse makes sense. This is where a commitment to love and a trust in Christ supersede our feelings, the first to act and the second to believe that God will bring our affections around. Love is an action. But there is another part we must be aware of:

**Bitterness that leads to harshness** – Colossians 3:19 says, *"Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them."* The word for harsh is *"stop being bitter, or do not have the habit of being bitter"*. Bitterness and resentment lead to harsh treatment rather than tender affection. Where does bitterness come from in marriage? It is found in unresolved, unforgiven, un-repentant sin against each other. Forgiveness is paramount to nurture and cherishing, since sin creates hardened resentment toward each other. Those that we love the most are those that hurt us the most, and words and actions can kill. Husbands, it is incumbent on us to keep short accounts, to confront sin and confess sin, to not let the sun go down on anger, and to make forgiveness a regular activity in our marriage. You set the tone of **GRACE in your marriage**, whether you will be a grudge holder, a silent responder, or an angry reactor or be quick to listen, proactive to forgive, and intentional to rid yourself of bitterness so you can look at your wife through the lens of grace, not hurt.

#### **Meaning of Marriage: Christ** (Eph. 5:31-33)

*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."*

Finally, Paul brings the focus on roles in marriage to crisp clarity, showing that the **mystery of marriage** (something that can only be revealed by God, not discovered by man) truly points to a greater reality. **First**, embedded into the creation of marriage in a Pre-Fall world, before the introduction and corruption of sin, is the **perpetuation** of marriage through the leaving and cleaving of children to create new families. The idea of "holding fast" or "cleaving" here is the word *cement or glue*, where an adult son/daughter will LEAVE his/her family, be glued to another in a covenant relationship, and the outcome will be progeny. Being glued together has a sexual connotation, as sexual union is the greatest sign of the covenant of marriage, but also speaks to **intimate, personal, and a sacred union** (Heb. 12:4). This signals to all parents that there will be a time that we will *release our children to adulthood* and some in marriage, meaning a change of relationship. No longer will a parent be the primary protector or nurturer but that responsibility is passed on to another. When parents try to hold onto the role too strongly it creates tension for the new family.

But, Paul states something profound and new, something that was NOT stated in Genesis but is only realized in Jesus, that the mystery of two people becoming one flesh truly points to the deeper reality of Christ and His church. Marriage becomes a picture of Christ's love for the church, His willingness to die for her, buy her back, sustain and beautify her while preparing for an eternity together. That is why we can say that marriage is founded on the gospel alone, since it displays the goodness of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Here is how John Piper described it:

*“The meaning of marriage is the display of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and his people... This covenant-keeping love reached its climax in the death of Christ for his church, his bride. That death was the ultimate expression of grace, which is the ultimate expression of God’s glory, which is of infinite value.”*

When we trust by faith to play the roles in marriage: a wife reflecting the church in its submission to Christ in all things through reverential fear, and a husband reflecting the loving sacrifice of Christ to His Bride the church, we not only **deepen our understanding** of marriage but of Christ Himself, and can truly glorify God as a result. That is why Paul brings back the statement of conclusion: *“However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”* It is NOT just a spiritual reality, but has implications in loving and respecting. Each of these not only displays Christ and the church, but also how men and women are geared.

Again, the emphasis here is not in our inability to do this, but our ability to play these roles ONLY in the strength that is supplied in Christ through the Holy Spirit. John Piper said it this way:

*The beauty of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and his church shines brightest when nothing but Christ can sustain it.”*

In the audacious call to love a wife, a husband displays his trust in Jesus for salvation, for strength, and for a model of how to do this. When he operates by the grace provided and is filled with the Spirit, he no longer is concerned about his own comfort or rights, but seeks the highest good of his Bride, simultaneously glorifying God in His marriage AND understanding Christ's immense love for him!!! When a wife decides to joyfully follow her husband in helpful support, she simultaneously glorifies the Lord in displaying trust AND understands the deep love for Christ for her!!! These are the marriages the world craves to have. These are marriages that reflect, depend on, and point to Christ in all things. Marriages that play their God given roles are the most monumental kinds of adventure when they are solely dependent on Christ for success.