

Husband, Love Your Wife, Part 1

Ephesians 5:25-33

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Today we come to God's command for all of us who are husbands. Twenty centuries of church history have passed since Paul wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus and the impact and influence of these commands have spread, really, around the world. We even live in a country that is still influenced, if only a little, by a Christian perspective of wives and marriage. So sitting here this morning, frankly it's very hard for us to really imagine how revolutionary Paul's command to husbands really was.

I think to fully appreciate it, I want to take you back for just a couple of minutes to what it would've been like to have, to have heard these words for the first time. In the first century Mediterranean world, that world was dominated by three great cultural influences. There was the influence of the Jewish people and their Scriptures, there was the influence of the Romans, and there was the influence of the Greeks. William Barclay describes how each of those groups viewed marriage and particularly the roles of husband and wife within marriage.

In the Jewish culture, and this may be a surprise to you, but in the Jewish culture of the first century, women occupied a very low place. Every day a Jewish man would pray a prayer thanking God that he was not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. One liberal but very popular rabbi of ancient times, Rabbi Hillel, had a very interesting interpretation of Deuteronomy 24. Now Deuteronomy 24:1 is the passage about divorce in the Old Testament and the grounds for it. The text itself speaks of uncleanness, or, as the *New American Standard* translates it, indecency. But Rabbi Hillel took that expression as sort of all-inclusive. He said that a man could divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner by putting too much salt on the food or if she burned the bread. He went on to say that if she walked in public with her head uncovered, he had grounds for divorce. Or you'll love this one, if she ever spoke disrespectfully of his parents. And of course, you can imagine how people delighted to sort of pick up this teaching of Rabbi Hillel and expand it, and make it even more lax, more liberal.

There was a Rabbi Akiba who said that the uncleanness of Deuteronomy 24 that allowed a man to divorce his wife was even if he found a woman who was more attractive to him than his wife,

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he was biblically allowed to divorce her. So, you can kind of get a picture of both the husband's attitude toward his wife in the Jewish culture from those descriptions.

And then there was the Romans. By the time of the first century, Roman marriage had really become a joke. Historians tell us that maybe for as much as the first five hundred years of the republic, there was no record of a divorce in Rome. But a couple of hundred years before Christ, it began to be allowed. And by the time of the New Testament, marriage was in shambles. Seneca, the Roman, writes that women determined what year it was by which husband they were married to that year. Juvenal, a Roman lawyer, writes of a woman who had eight husbands in five years. Jerome, the Biblical scholar, insists that in his research he discovered that in Rome there was one case in which a woman was married to her twenty-third husband, and she was his twenty-first wife. Did they really think it, they were going to get it right that time? I wonder what people like that think. That was the atmosphere of the Roman culture.

Then there was the Greek culture. And of course, the Greek culture had spread before the Romans through Alexander the Great and his influence, really permeated the Mediterranean world. The Greek view of marriage and women was even worse and more deplorable. The great Athenian philosopher, Demosthenes, said this, "We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately, and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs." In the Greek culture, the women of the upper classes had their own apartments which they essentially lived in separate from the world. They had no part in public life. They never went out alone. They never attended meals or social occasions. The Greek historian Xenophon said that was true so that wives "might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible and ask as little as possible." The Greek philosopher, the great Greek philosopher Socrates wrote this: "Is there anyone to whom you entrust more serious matters than to your wife? And is there anyone to whom you talk less?"

That is the culture in which the Ephesians lived. Those dominant influences were in the church in Ephesus. They were there before they became Christians and they continued to permeate afterwards. So try to imagine, if you will, the first time that these new Christians brought to Christ from the city of Ephesus with all those different backgrounds, with all those different cultural influences, sat down and heard their new pastor Paul teach them what Christian marriage should be like. It would have been a dramatic experience. That's how you need to hear the text as we come to it today because that's the world into which Paul spoke.

Now I need to begin by admitting to you, as I have admitted to my wife Sheila, that I don't come close to the standard I'm going to present for you today and neither do you. It's an impossible standard, but here's the key. By God's grace, I have committed to my wife and to the Lord that I will continue pursuing this standard, and my plea with all of you husbands is the same. Don't let the high standard cause you to turn away; instead, let it serve as the impetus to pursuing still more the standard that Christ has set.

Now we've already discovered in this passage that the husband is the head of the wife, not ought to be the head of the wife, he is the head of the wife. Look back up in verse 23, "The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church..." It's a reality. So men, whether we like it or not, we are leading. We may be good leaders. We may be poor leaders. We may be active leaders, or we may have effectively abdicated our responsibility in the home. But in God's sight, we bear the responsibility of being the leader. When there are problems in our marriages or in our homes, the husband may not bear all of the guilt for those problems, but he always bears the complete responsibility. You say, "What do you mean by that? How does that work?"

Well, if you'll remember a few years ago the tragic prison abuse scandal in Iraq where just a handful of our soldiers, brought reproach on the name of the rest of them by how they treated some prisoners. And we saw the photographs, and we saw what happened, and we all were shocked by it. The commanding officer in that case was not personally guilty of the abuse, but he was rightfully held responsible because he was in charge. That's how it is with us. Husbands and fathers are ultimately responsible for everything that happens in the sphere of our responsibility. So we're leaders whether we like it or not.

In Ephesians 5, we learn what that leadership toward our wives should actually look like. Let me read it for you. I'll begin in verse 25 of Ephesians 5 and read through the end of the chapter:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE

FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband.

Now wives, you have to admit that as hard as last week was to hear, as we walked through the three verses that speak about your submission, that what you're commanded to do is relatively easy compared to this. You are to respond to your husband as all of us are to respond to Christ. But husbands, you and I are required to love our wives as Christ Himself loves the church. Now as this passage unfolds, it begins in verse 25 with a simple command. There is a command: "Husbands, love your wives...." And then from there as the passage continues to unfold, Paul uses two pictures or two illustrations to help us see what that looks like. So let's begin to work our way through the passage, and let's start with the command, the command itself. Verse 25, "Husbands, love your wives...."

Now it's very important not to forget the flow of Paul's thought here in this passage. You remember back up in verse 18, he commanded all of us to allow the Spirit to be in control, to allow the Spirit to fill us with a rich understanding of the word so that we can live a life of Biblical wisdom. Then in verses 19 to 21, he explains the consequences of being under the influence of the Spirit. We'll have a love for God-centered music. We'll have a pattern of thanksgiving in our lives. And we'll have a heart of submission to those in human authority, verse 21. Then beginning in verse 22 and running through the end of chapter 5 and all the way through 6:9, Paul gives us three examples of what that submission to human authority looks like that he introduced back in verse 21. So, the focus of this entire section then is submission to authority. Keep that in mind. This passage is about submission to authority, wives to husbands in 5:22 through the end of the chapter, children to parents in 6:1 to 4, and slaves to masters in 6:5 to 9.

Now when he gets to children and parents at the beginning of chapter 6, you'll notice there he spends three verses talking to children about their submission to the authority in their lives and he spends one verse, verse 4, talking to parents about what they are to do as those who are in authority. When he gets to slaves and masters, notice, beginning in verse 5 of chapter 6, he spends four verses on those under authority (that is, slaves) and one verse on masters.

But it's completely different with wives and husbands because with wives and husbands, Paul spends three verses on the wives and then the rest of the chapter on husbands. He spends forty Greek words talking to wives, and he spends a hundred and fifteen talking to husbands. Why is

that? Obviously, Paul intends to stress here just how important these things are to be. Even though he's primarily talking about submission to authority, he punctuates how we are to lead, men, what our leadership is to be because we need our sinful ideas of what leadership and authority is corrected. Alexander Strauch writes,

Tragically, some Christian men think that headship means dictatorship or lordship, being the boss. Thus, the Christian doctrine of headship has been misused to justify the physical and mental abuse of women, keeping women in their place, demeaning and controlling women, working wives to death or [perhaps worst of all] neglecting them. But Christian husbands [Strauch goes on to say] who abuse or neglect their wives don't understand authentic Christian marriage, they don't understand loving servant leadership, and they certainly don't understand Ephesians 5.

Paul wants us to understand, men, what our headship, our leadership, what our authority looks like. John Piper writes, "The husband who plops himself in front of the TV and orders his wife around like a slave has abandoned Christ for Archie Bunker."

This command to love our wives is really an extraordinary command. First, because as I already showed you, it was completely out of step with the culture in the first century. And guess what? It's still out of step with the culture. It is revolutionary. If you go back and scour the, the ancient statements about household life, not one secular household list of rules says there is to be love from the husband to the wife.

Now notice that Paul addressed this command to men who were currently married, "Husbands [if you're already a husband], love your wife..." However, it's certainly applicable by application to all men except those who believe they have the gift of singleness. So, unless you believe you have the gift of singleness, heads up. Listen up. This is for you. By the way, let me just stop here for a moment and say something. For you young men who are of marriageable age; that is, you're old enough to get married but you aren't married and you're sitting there thinking, "There's no way I have the gift of singleness," I have discovered something through my years of life and experience that there is an important first step in our culture to becoming a happily married man and it is to ask a woman out. I understand, and apparently some other people understand, that some of you guys have not yet mastered that skill. I hate to tell you this, but God is not gonna deliver her to your door by FedEx. It isn't going to happen like that so get with the program. By the way, by the way, parents, I should also hasten to say I'm not talking about teens

recreational dating. If your teen isn't old enough to be married and isn't pursuing marriage, you talk about a recipe for disaster. Just let them date recreationally. But for those of you who are of marriageable age, get busy.

Now back to the command. Husbands ... sorry, that was meddling, wasn't it? "Husbands, love your wives...." Notice that it is an imperative. It is a command. Now there are several implications of that. And by the way, that's true in Greek and English. It is a clear cut command. Several implications of the fact that this is a command, first of all, that means that no husband is exempt from this command for any reason. It's addressed to all the husbands sitting under the reading of this letter in the church in Ephesus. That means every husband here, everyone who will be a husband, is included in this command.

Now I've heard a lot of excuses from husbands as to why they don't do this. They'll say things like, "Well, you just don't know my wife." No, I may not, but God does and there are no footnotes in this verse. There are no exception clauses that say, "Well, you need to do this unless...." You say, "You don't understand. My wife's not the same woman I married." Really? Who is she? You know, I understand that. I do understand that. There are times when, you know, my wife will say something like, "Honey, I think I'm just going to leave these dishes in the sink tonight, and I'll wash 'em in the morning" and my first response to that is: "Who are you, and what did you do with my wife?" Maybe your spouse has changed. We all change, but that doesn't let you off the hook. There are no exceptions here. "Husbands, love your wives...." You say, "Well, my wife doesn't submit to me. I don't find her attractive anymore. I now wish I hadn't married her. Maybe it was a mistake. Maybe we got married for the wrong reasons." Or here's a very popular one, "I don't need to love my wife because she doesn't love me."

I love 1 John 4:19. Listen to what it says, "We [speaking of Christ, we] love Him because He first loved us." Because Christ our husband first loved us as His bride, we as His bride respond to that love. Men, when there's a lack of love in our homes, we are responsible. Just as the church responds to Christ's love, the wife responds to the husband's love. Now, I understand there are exceptions. There are women as there are men who have sinful, evil hearts and make sinful, evil decisions, and they go off regardless of how they are loved and cared for. But often, if our wives don't love us, it is a reflection of our failure to love them. So, there are no acceptable excuses. It's a command: "Husband, love your wives...."

Another implication of this command, and this is an important one, is that we have the capacity to do this thing. God would not have commanded us to do it if it weren't possible for us to do it. If you are in Christ, you have the capacity to exhibit this kind of love to your spouse.

A third implication of this being a command is that love begins and is sustained, true biblical love begins and is sustained not by feelings and emotions or by physical attraction, but by a decision of the will. If you can be commanded to love, that means true love is something you choose to do. I don't mean there's no emotion in love. Of course there's emotion. We're commanded to love God with our whole being, including our emotions. But the fact that God commands this of us means that love is ultimately a decision we can choose to make. You choose to love someone. It's not like, you know, the stomach flu that just kind of comes on you and you can't help it.

The most obvious example of this is a couple who has no children of their own, and they decide to adopt or perhaps they do have children of their own, and they decide to adopt another child. What do they do? They go and pick up that child who's unrelated to them, who has really nothing in common with them, whom they don't know at all. And from the first day they pick up that child, they make a conscious choice to set their love on that person. So every husband is commanded to love his wife.

By the way, in the original language, the tense of the verb "love" is present tense. That means it's a continual command. In other words, it's to be a constant occupation of our lives. You can't say, "You know, honey, I loved you when we got married. If I ever change my mind, I'll tell you again." Love is something that's to be a constant reality.

Now the word "love" here is "agape." You're familiar with that word. You've heard it before. It's used six times in this section, very important word. It's a love that loves regardless of the object. Understand this. It is a love that loves completely irrespective of the object. It loves regardless of merit, regardless of worth, regardless of value, regardless of loveliness, even loves those who are completely undeserving. It is an unselfish, self-sacrificing desire to pursue the highest good of the person on whom you've set your love. It's the same love God has shown toward us. Paul has already told us that we have been the recipients of just this kind of love. Go back to Ephesians 1:4,

In love God predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself....[God, in His great heart, moved by this kind of love, decided to legally

adopt us as His own children. He predetermined our destiny to be His legal children.]

In 3:17, Paul prays that we would be rooted and grounded, our spiritual lives would find their foundation in an understanding of Christ's love for us. Verse 18,

... [that we would] comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love which Christ has for us, which surpasses knowledge so that you may be [full] filled up with all the fullness of God.

Chapter 5:2. He says, "... walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as [a soothing aroma] a fragrant aroma [to God.]" You have been loved with exactly this kind of love if you're a Christian. And so, Paul turns it around and he says, "Because you have experienced this kind of love, you are to demonstrate this kind of love for others." Look back in 4:2. As he begins to talk about how we can walk worthy and part of that is walking in unity in the church, he says in the end of verse 2, "I want you to show tolerance for one another." This isn't tolerating sin. This is overlooking our weaknesses and our eccentricities and those things that we can overlook that aren't detrimental to the other person that need to be confronted per Matthew 18, "showing tolerance for one another in love...." Because you love them, demonstrate this tolerance, this care for them.

Chapter 4:15, as the church functions the way it's supposed to function, we speak the truth in love. And through that, we grow up into Christ. Verse 16, the whole body is held together by that which every joint supplies. And every part does what it's supposed to do and that causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in the whole atmosphere of love, this kind of love.

So we experience this kind of love. We're to show this same kind of love within the body of Christ. And guess what? Now Paul takes it home. He says we're to show this same kind of love toward our wives.

Now let me give you a brief warning if you see that word "agape" and you're tempted to draw too great a distinction between the Greek words for "phileo" and "agape." They're often used synonymously so don't make too great a distinction. In John 5:20 for example, Christ says the Father loves Him (this is Christ speaking of the Father's love; He says the Father loves Me) with

a “phileo” kind of love. So that word can be used of a wonderful love. On the other hand, “agape” isn’t always used of high and holy love. For example, in Luke 11:43, it says that the scribes and Pharisees loved (“agape”) the chief seats in the synagogue. So “agape” and “phileo” are often used as synonyms to describe various kinds of human love just as we use the English word “love.” Think about it for a moment. We use the English word ‘love’ when we say I love ice cream or I love my children or I love God. We use the same word. In both Greek and in English, it’s the context that informs us as to the exact nature of the love we’re talking about. So the key points to be made here about the husband’s love for his wife don’t necessarily come from the husband’s, or I should say from this Greek word, but rather they come from the context. And in this context, it’s the example of Jesus Christ. So there’s the command: “Husbands, love your wives....”

In the following verses, Paul is then going to illustrate that love. He’s going to illustrate the kind of love we’re to have in two pictures or two analogies. The first picture or analogy is Christ’s love for the church or Christ’s treatment of the church in, beginning in the middle of verse 25 and going down through verse 27. The second picture comes in verses 28 to 30, and it’s our own treatment of our bodies.

Now today I want to just begin to look at that first picture, Christ’s treatment of the church, Christ’s love for the church. You want to know, husband, what your love for your wife should look like? Here’s the first snapshot. Here’s the first picture to help you see what it should be. And Paul specifically identifies two qualities of Jesus’ love for the church that you and I are to copy. So he uses this picture of Christ’s love for the church. And in that picture, he shows us two qualities of Christ’s love that you and I should copy in our love for our wives.

The first quality of Christ’s love that we should copy in our own lives is sacrificial love. Our love should be a sacrificial love. We must put her needs before our own. Look again at verse 25: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her....” Christ loved the church so much that He gave Himself up for her. He sacrificed Himself for her. Go back to 5:2. I read it just a moment ago. He said, “Christ loved you and He gave Himself up for us ... [as] a sacrifice.” He sacrificed Himself literally.

Go back to John 15 because in the upper room discourse the night before His crucifixion, our Lord touches on this kind of love that He has for His disciples. Verse 12 of John 15, He says: “This is My commandment, that you love one another, (and that you do that) just as I have loved you.” And then He makes this compelling statement, verse 13, “Greater love has no one than

this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” There’s the ultimate manifestation of love, a willingness to lay down your life, to sacrifice yourself for someone else, to sacrifice your life for someone else. Christ did that literally. And husbands, you and I, if we’re going to follow Christ’s example, must be willing to love our wives so sacrificially that we would even be willing to die for them.

If I were to ask you this morning, “Are you willing to die for your wife?” most of us here would glibly say, “Well, of course.” And that’s easy because guess what? Most of us in this room will never be called to die for our wives. So let’s ask the other question. Are you willing to make sacrifices as you live for her? Like one wife told her husband, she said, “Listen, honey. I know that you’re willing to die for me. You’ve told me that many, many times. But while we’re waiting for that opportunity, could you help me with the dishes?” 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, his own desires, opinions, preferences and welfare aside if that is required to please her and meet her needs. He dies to self in order to live for his wife because that is what Christ’s kind of love demands.

Men, we are the leader, but our leadership isn’t about asserting our rights. It’s not about asserting our authority. It’s about service. It’s about giving up our life for her just as Christ did. Love is not about what I can get. It’s not about my feelings or my desires. It’s not, as I said before, something that you can’t control, that just overwhelms you like a bad case of the stomach flu. At its heart, love is an unselfish, self-sacrificing decision of the will to meet the needs of another person, motivated solely by your concern for them. Love is about giving of yourself to someone else. “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her....”

Now men, let me ask you, and this is a serious soul-searching question for us all. Does your wife think of you as someone who regularly sacrifices your own desires and preferences for her, to sacrificially serve her? Let me give us all a few practical ways that we can sacrificially love our wives like that, a few very practical ways to flesh this out in real life.

Number one: determine that you will put your wife’s interests, desires and needs before your own. Determine you will put your wife’s interests, desires and needs before your own. And by the way, we shouldn’t just do this for our wives. Philippians 2 tells us we’re to do this for

everyone. We are to consider the other person as better than ourselves and we are to look out for their interests before we look out for our own. But specifically, we should do this for our wives. Now let me flesh that out a little bit because that's pretty nebulous still. How do you do that? Let me, let me just get real practical. There, there's an opportunity for you to do this every, almost every day of your life when you get home from work. Because when you get home from work, what do you want to do? You really just want (you're tired, it's been a long day you really just want) to plop down maybe in your lounge chair or you want to look through the paper, you want to go fulfill a hobby, you know, ride your bike, go for a run, whatever, read a book, watch TV. You want to do something for yourself.

But guys, when you get home, and you want to do that, your wife wants to what? What does she want to do? You do know! Good! She wants to talk. Or she needs help with dinner or some problem with the kids, or maybe there's no food in the house that's edible, and she wants to go out to dinner and then do some shopping, and she wants you to go with her. What are you going to choose? Are you going to choose for yourself or are you going to sacrifice for her? That's what it means to sacrifice your desires and preferences for her benefit, even as Christ did.

Kent Hughes writes, "For some men, golf is synonymous to Dante's paradise (that wouldn't be me by the way), whereas the entrance to a department store, like the gates of hell, bears the inscription 'Abandon all hope ye who enter here.'" Hughes goes on to say, "But if we love our wives, we will forsake the platonic greens for the fiery gates because we value their interests and love to be with them." Men, do you put your wife's interests and desires ahead of your own? Christ certainly did.

Another practical way we can fulfill this sacrificial love is by really listening to our wives. You said your wife wanted to talk. You know what she really wants is she doesn't want to talk; she wants a conversation. She wants you to hear what she says and you to meaningfully interact with what she says. So put the paper down, turn off the ESPN and have a conversation. Really listen. One of our favorite times for Sheila and me as a couple is after the younger kids are in bed and this is getting harder to do now as they get older, but we'll often sit and talk through the day. And I think wherever you find that time, however you carve it out, however it's created, I think Sheila would tell you that taking that time with her communicates to her volumes about my love for her because it shows that I want a relationship and not just a housekeeper.

Thirdly, work to understand what makes your wife feel loved and do it. Work to understand what makes your wife feel loved and do it. You know, for me, I'm kind of a "be with" kind of guy,

you know? I am perfectly content if Sheila and I are together anywhere. I often tell her and I mean it from the bottom of my heart, “There’s no one in the world I’d rather be with.” And that means I’m perfectly happy if we’re at Home Depot. But I have learned a few things. I’m a slow learner. I’ve learned a few things through the years and one of those is that Home Depot stop is not as relationally satisfying for her as it is for me. I’ve learned that my wife appreciates gifts, but gifts are really not a big deal to her either. She feels especially loved when we sit down together and have some serious quality time and we talk deeply about things that are on her heart and mind and are on my heart and mind. Now that doesn’t necessarily come natural to me. That’s not something that would be my first thought to do, but I have a choice to make, a conscious choice to love my wife by doing the very thing I know makes her feel loved or to choose what I want.

A fourth practical application of all of this sacrificial love is find out what your wife’s real needs are and seek to meet them. Find out what your wife’s real needs are and seek to meet them. You say, “How do I find out?” Ask her. I guarantee you she can tell you. Before Sheila and I were married, we did this and I’ve shared this with you before, but we both wrote out a list. We wanted to fulfill this passage. We wanted to love each other. And so, we wanted to know what are the things you really do want and need from me? I wrote a list for her and she wrote a list for me and here are a few preapproved points from her list.

She wrote, “I need to know (and this is now almost twenty-five years ago,) I need to know that I have your unconditional love. The more sure I am of your love, the more willing and eager I will be to change those areas in me that don’t please you. I need to know that in your eyes, I’m the most attractive woman on earth no matter how pale, bloated or shriveled I may become (and she hasn’t by the way). Others can be beautiful, glamorous and cute, but I must know they don’t attract you more than I do. I need your sympathy and understanding no matter how foolishly or unreasonably I may be acting, please listen, comfort and later correct (I’m still learning that one). I need your gentle rebuke when I’m wrong, but I also need your understanding and forgiveness when I don’t respond well. I need your attention. Wherever we are, whatever we’re doing, I need to know you’re aware of and concerned about me. Just a gentle squeeze of my hand or a wink will usually do.”

Those are just a few of the things she expressed that were real needs. And while I haven’t fulfilled those perfectly, she would tell you and I would tell you it’s been my goal to strive to meet those needs. Ask your wife what hers are and strive to meet them. That’s sacrificial love.

Men, if we're going to love our wives as Christ loved the church, our love must be sacrificial. But don't miss the big point that Paul is making here. The standard of our love for our wives is nothing less than the cross of Jesus Christ. Both of the verbs back in 25 point to the cross. He loved her and He demonstrated that love by freely giving up Himself. He gave Himself up in death because of His selfless, sacrificial love for His bride. Marriage is a sacred thing. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes,

“How many of us have realized that we are always to think of marriage in terms of the atonement? Is that our customary way of thinking of marriage? Where do we find (the) what Christian books have to say about marriage? Under which section? Under Christian ethics?” [Or we could add in today's world under Christian family.] Lloyd-Jones goes on to say: “But it does not belong there. We must remember marriage in terms of the doctrine of the atonement.”

Lloyd-Jones is right. That's what Paul is telling us here. He's making an absolutely crucial point about our love for our wives and he's saying it's to be like what Jesus did when He died for us. Our Lord laid down His life willingly, voluntarily, but don't miss this point. Our Lord loved His bride sacrificially like that when she hated Him and was His enemy. Look at Romans 5. In Romans 5, Paul makes this point very clear. Verse 6, “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” Verse 8,

... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of *God* through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Notice what we were like when Jesus found us, when He loved us, when He gave Himself up for us. Notice verse 6: helpless, ungodly; verse 8: enemies. I'm sorry, verse 8: sinners; verse 10: enemies. That's who we were. For all of us, there is a lesson. For man, every man, woman and child here today, there's a lesson in this about Christ's love for His church, for us. That's how unattractive, how ugly, how sinful, how wretched we all were when Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. His love for us was not conditioned on who we were. “Amazing love, how can it be that Thou my God shouldst die for me.”

And men, there's a lesson here for us as well, a lesson about the love we're to have for our wives. We are to love our wives regardless of who they are, regardless of how responsive they are to us, regardless of how lovable they are or how submissive or whether they love us in return. Whether they are young or old, whether they are homely or beautiful, whether they are slow or intelligent, whether they are responsive to us or cold as ice, we are to love them just as Christ loved us when we were His enemies and hated Him.

We're to have a sacrificial love for them (why?) because that's exactly the same kind of love Christ showed us. And we're to return that out of gratitude to Him. We're not only to love Him, but we're to love our wives in the same way. And we're to do it all of our lives even if we never get any response and even if we never see any benefit from it. We do it because it is the reflection of the love that Jesus Christ has shown to us. What if He had waited until our response was everything it should be? What if He had waited to love you and to sacrifice Himself for you until you were submissive to Him? What if He had waited until you loved Him in return? We would all die in our sins and spend eternity in hell.

Men, the challenge, the standard is very high. We're to love our wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for us. How do you reach that standard? We never reach it perfectly in this life, but how do you even begin? You begin back in verse 18. You can only do it under the influence of the Spirit's power in your life as He makes the word come alive, even as He hopefully has done this morning, and moves you toward obedience. May God give us all the grace to love our wives as Christ loved the church.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for our time together this morning. We thank You first of all for the reality, the spiritual reality that lies behind this admonition, this command, the fact that Christ set His love on us when we were completely His enemies, when we hated Him, when we didn't want to marry Him at all, when we didn't have a submissive heart toward Him, He loved us and gave Himself for us. Father, we thank You and bless You.

And Father, I pray for all of us here as believers. Help us to understand that truth. Help us to appreciate something of the height and depth and breadth and length and to know the love that Christ has for us. And then, Father, I pray for us here this morning who are husbands. You have set an impossible standard for us. Father, we thank You that someday, when we're in Your presence, we will love perfectly. But until that day, Lord, give us the resolve, and give us the

power to pursue obedience to this command we've studied today. Lord, help us who are so selfish, who are always thinking of what we want and what our desires are. Help us, Lord, to pursue obedience. Forgive us for letting our selfishness mar the picture of what Christ's love to us is like. And Lord, make us husbands who demonstrate, reflect in some small way the love of Christ for His church.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.