

Husband, Love Your Wife, Part 3

Ephesians 5:25-33

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Turn with me again to Ephesians 5 as we continue to look at what the apostle Paul has to say about our responsibility as husbands to our wives. As we all know, our country right now is locked in a national debate about health care and health care costs and health care reform. What is not debated is that health care costs have been rising for the last several years. In 2008, the last year for which this data's available, health care expenditures surpassed 2.3 trillion dollars in the U.S. alone. That's three times more than we spent as a country in 1990 and that's eight times what was spent in 1980. That means that health care spending in the U.S., what we spent to care for our bodies, was almost eight thousand dollars per U.S. resident. That's accounting for about sixteen percent of the nation's gross domestic product.

Well, there's a lot of disagreement about whether this is a problem, whether anything needs to be done at all and if so, exactly what should be done. But I'm presenting those numbers to you with a different purpose this morning because I want you to see the amount of money that we as a nation and we as individuals tend to spend on our bodies. Health care is just one part of that picture. If you add to that the annual amounts spent on other industries caring for our bodies such as the beauty industry, the food industry, add in sports and exercise and there are other industries I'm sure as well that we could sort of roll into this package, it quickly becomes clear that we live in a nation that is preoccupied with caring for the body. And although our nation's preoccupation frankly borders on obsession, it's because there is within each of us a God-given, natural desire to take care of our bodies.

Now we all do this care for our bodies in different ways, in our own ways and to the limits we decide. For example, some of us, when we talk about taking care of our bodies, for some of us that means going to the doctor as often as we feel something might be wrong and we're told the average American taking ten prescriptions a year. For others of us, it means avoiding organized medicine altogether and taking only natural vitamins and supplements. For some of us, caring for our bodies means dieting and exercise. For others of us, it means eating whatever we want and avoiding everything that calls for any physical exertion. For some people, caring for the body means getting outdoors, getting in the fresh air, being active. For others, it means staying inside

where there's air conditioning and watching television. For some, it means grinding their own wheat and making their own bread. For others among us whom, whose names I will not call, it means Twinkies. But regardless of what it looks like for each one of us, we all have in common this inherent, natural commitment to take care of ourselves, however we might define that.

In the passage that we come to this morning, Paul acknowledges that natural inclination, that natural desire, and he uses it to challenge us as men and husbands to love our wives. We're in Ephesians 5 and here we're learning what our Lord commands about the relationship that men and women are to have in marriage. Really this passage about marriage flows out of a passage that describes being filled with the Spirit; that is, being under the influence of the Spirit. And one of the primary consequences that Paul gives us of being filled with the Spirit up in verse 21 is having a heart of submission to human authority. Where the Spirit is in control, there is not only a heart submissive to God, but there is a heart submissive to duly constituted human authority.

So, Paul then sets out three examples of what that submission to authority looks like. The first one he gives us is the one we're looking at. It's the submission of wives to their husbands. It begins in verse 22 and runs all the way through the end of the chapter. In the first three verses of that section - 22, 23, and 24, Paul talks to the wives and we looked at that in detail. He says, "Wives, you're to submit to your own husbands in everything as to the Lord." The only exception to that we saw was where your husband's wishes contradict the clear commands of the Word of God. And if you weren't here for that, I encourage you ladies to go back and review that because it's so important. That is the foundation for what we're talking about.

Now again, the passage is talking about submission to authority and so primarily the focus in this passage is on wives and their submission to their husbands. But after addressing the wives, Paul turns to the husbands. He wants us to understand, men, that while we are the leaders in the home, while our wives are to submit to our authority, we cannot structure our leadership in just any way we like. Instead, there is a model of leadership that we have to strive to imitate and that model is none other than Jesus Christ. Our leadership is to be characterized by the same kind of love that Christ's leadership for the church has.

Let me read the passage for you with that background. It begins in verse 25 of Ephesians 5:

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 would 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 we've already begun to work our way through this passage addressed to husbands. Again, this is sort of an aside. He's dealing with submission through this whole passage and into chapter 6, but in each case, he addresses the leader, the one, the authority to whom the person is to submit. In the other cases, he does it with a single verse in chapter 6, to parents and to masters, but here he gives nine verses to us as husbands. He begins with the command itself in verse 25: "Husbands, love your wives...." And we looked at all that that means. It's a command to love our wives.

And then he gives us two pictures of what that looks like. He illustrates it with two pictures. The first picture that we looked at last time is Christ's treatment of the church. You want to know, husband, what your love for Christ should look like? It looks like Christ's treatment of His church. And in these verses, Paul identifies two specific qualities of Christ's love for His church that you and I are to copy. We saw them. The first is sacrificing love or self-sacrificial love. We are to put our wives' needs ahead of our own "even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her." He put her needs clearly ahead of His own. It was self-sacrificing love.

Our love for our wives, like Christ's love for the church, is also to be a sanctifying love. We are compelled to pursue her spiritual progress. Christ set out to deliver the church to Himself as a bride that's perfect, spiritually perfect, reflecting His own image. And husbands, the point here Paul is making is that you and I are to live with our wives in such a way and to love her in such a way that she grows in her spiritual life. The question is, is your wife more like Jesus Christ today because she's married to you? Does your wife have a greater desire for spiritual things today because of your influence in her life? That's the question.

Now this morning, we leave that first picture, the picture of Christ's treatment of His church, but not entirely as you'll see in a moment. But we're moving to a second picture that Paul gives us

and it's our treatment of our bodies. Husbands, you want to know what your love for your wife looks like? Not only do you look at Christ's treatment of His church, but look at your own treatment of your body. This is what he develops in the passage I want us to look at this morning, verses 28 to 30. Look at it again:

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.

Now obviously here, Paul changes pictures somewhat, not entirely as we'll see in a moment, but he does change the picture somewhat from Christ's treatment of the church to our treatment of our bodies. The question is why? Why? Especially, why does he go from so exalted and elevated a picture of Christ's eternal, self-sacrificing, sanctifying love for the church to a picture that's so mundane and ordinary as how we care for our own bodies? Well, as I thought about that this week, I think there are several reasons we could give for why he uses this second picture. One of them is because he's really not leaving Christ and His love for the church. Look at the end of this section, verse 29. He comes back to Christ and His love for the church, that Christ loves His body just as we are to love our wives as we love our own bodies. So, he doesn't really leave the relationship of Christ and the church.

Another reason is, and I think this is the key one, is that he wants us to really understand what our responsibilities are. And let's just be honest, men. We have a problem fully grasping Christ's love for us. When I tell you, "Okay, I want you to love your wife as Christ loved the church," we have a problem understanding exactly what that looks like. We understand some of what that looks like. It's spelled out on the pages of Scripture. We looked at it the last week. We saw what some of that means, but still it's not something we live with day in and day out in a, in a hands-on, face to face sort of way. But we thoroughly understand what it looks like to provide for and take care of our own bodies. So, it's a picture that we can easily, readily, transparently understand.

John Stott puts it like this: "We cannot fully grasp the greatness of Christ's love. It surpasses knowledge as he wrote earlier in chapter 3. Nor do husbands find it easy to apply this standard to the realities of family life. But we all know from everyday experience how we love ourselves; hence the practical usefulness of the golden rule Jesus enunciated that we should treat others as we would ourselves like to be treated." So, I think that's one of the reasons, probably the main

reason, which he makes this change to this other picture because we can get it, guys. You can understand this. You may have missed the first one. You may not have gotten all the nuances of the first one, but you can understand this one.

I also think he uses this picture because our wives are really part of us as if they were members of our body. He's eventually going to get to verse 31 and Genesis 2:24 which says when a husband and wife marry, they are glued together, they're welded together in every sense, body and soul, and they become one flesh. So, in reality, when he tells us to love our bodies, he's telling us to love our wives who are now one with us.

So, as Paul lays the groundwork for this second picture, he begins by explaining why this picture works, and let's walk through it with him beginning in verse 28. Here is this picture of our love for our own bodies and therefore helping us understand how to care for our wives. "So husbands ought (stop there - literally, the Greek word translated "ought" is a Greek word that implies moral obligation. We could say that. Husbands are morally obligated) to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself..." Now understand Paul is not here encouraging self-love. I know that the Christian bookstores are filled with books that will tell you, sort of espousing modern self-esteem psychology, they'll tell you that your real problem in your relationships is that you don't love yourself enough. And if you could just spend the next forty years learning to love yourself, then maybe you would be able to love others.

That's not what Paul is saying at all. In fact, he's saying it is natural to love ourselves. We don't have to be taught to love ourselves. It comes absolutely natural. And we manifest that love by caring for our own bodies. Everywhere, the Scripture assumes that we will look out for ourselves, we will look out for our own needs, we'll look out for our own interests.

Let me just remind you of a couple of examples of that. The second great commandment our Lord quotes in the gospels comes from Leviticus, Leviticus 19:18. Listen to what it says: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." What is the implication in that command? That you do love yourself, that you understand what that looks like, and therefore you're to treat that neighbor in the way you yourself would want to be treated. Our Lord puts this explicitly, doesn't He, in Matthew 7:12: "In everything, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

All the Scripture about your responsibilities to other people is encompassed in that simple understanding. You want to treat, you treat yourself a certain way. You want others to treat you a

certain way. Treat them the same way. The clear implication is that we understand what it means to love ourselves, to care about ourselves and we look out for ourselves.

Philippians 2 makes this same point. Philippians 2:4, Paul says to the, the believers there in Philippi, “You know, I’m concerned that there are some of you who really aren’t looking out for your own personal interests.” Is that what he says? No! He says, “don’t merely look out for your own personal interests [I don’t have to teach any of you to do that], but look also for the interests of others. That I have to teach you. That I have to remind you of. We are inherently self-lovers. We care for ourselves.

Now back in Ephesians 5, here Paul is saying this: “Husbands, we naturally love ourselves [and particularly his reference here is to our bodies and the care for our bodies] and so we should remember then that our wives are part of us, as it were part of our bodies. And therefore to love her is to love part of me.” Peter O’Brien puts it like this: “The husband’s obligation to love his wife as his own body is not simply a matter of loving someone else just like he loves himself. It is to love himself.” In other words, it’s not a matter of comparison. You love yourself this way. Love your wife like that. No, that’s not what Paul’s saying. Paul is saying, “To love your wife is to love yourself because she’s part of you.” If you grasp that she’s a part of you, it is rational and reasonable to care for her just as you care for your own physical body and it’s irrational not to do so. Look at the next verse, verse 29, “for no one ever hated his own flesh....”

Now this word “flesh” is sometimes used to describe the unredeemed part of us, our unredeemed humanness and it’s used pejoratively or negatively. Here, it’s simply a synonym for the body. And I think he uses the word “flesh” here for body because he’s setting us up for the quotation from Genesis 2 down in verse 31 where the two are made one flesh. So, he uses the word to kind of get us prepared for that idea, but he’s talking about our bodies. No one ever hated his own body. Now Paul doesn’t mean by that that there, there aren’t disturbed people or people dominated by sinful thinking who have never hated their own bodies. He mentions some of them. They are ascetics. He mentions them in Colossians and he condemns them. So, he’s not saying that that concept never happens. The construction here in the Greek text is like a proverb. It’s like a general truth. There are exceptions, but it’s generally true everywhere. His point is that no person naturally, in a rational state of mind, has ever hated or refused to care for part of his own body. In fact, exactly the opposite is true. Every person does everything he can to take care of his own body.

I saw this borne out in my own life just a week ago. Like many of you, last Saturday I was sitting with my wife on the back patio, and I looked out and I saw that spring had erupted in our yard.

We have a couple of live oaks, and one of those live oaks loves to send up these sprouts every spring from all the roots, like a little forest of mini-oak trees under this live oak tree. And I, we wanted that just to be mulched and to have some other things there, So, I needed to pull those up or cut them off below the ground, and so I went out to do that. Well I really wasn't prepared to do it. I hadn't woken up that morning to do it. I just saw them, and I thought I need to take care of that. So I went over and without gloves or anything, I just sort of pulling up those oak shoots and in some cases they were larger, hacking them off just below the ground. And when I was done, I looked at my hand, and I realized that I should've put on gloves because there was - I'd pulled back, I'd gotten a blister, and then I'd pulled back the skin and sort of doubled it under so there was this dime-size area on my finger that was pretty seriously damaged with dirt all in it and oak trimmings and all kinds of things, and so I needed to do a little self-care this week to deal with that.

Now imagine if you had stumbled across my yard last Saturday when I noticed that I had this problem with my finger and you heard me saying something like this to my finger. Just imagine this conversation: "I am fed up with you not doing your part around here. I am sick and tired of your whining and complaining after all I've done to provide for you and to put a roof over your head. I just want to know this. What's in this relationship for me? What am I getting out of this? I'm the one always putting out. I'm the one always making the sacrifices. When are you going to contribute? You are just pathetic. I hate you and wish you would leave." Now we would never do that, would we, to a part of our body? Here's the point, men. It is just as ridiculous to speak to your wife that way. It is just as illogical to treat her with that kind of contempt. She is a part of you.

A few years ago when, actually many years ago now, when my foot was broken, through a softball accident, I was especially tender with it. If you've had a broken limb, you know this. You're careful. You, you care for it. You're even tender in the way you touch it. That's how we all respond. We naturally care for our own bodies. That's what Paul is saying. And he uses that point to say that's how we ought to care for our wives.

Charles Hodge writes: "It is just as unnatural for a man to hate his wife as it would be for him to hate himself or his own body. A man may have a body which does not altogether suit him (uh oh). He may wish it were handsomer, healthier, stronger or more active. Still, it is his body. It is himself. And he nourishes it and cherishes it as tenderly as though it were the best and loveliest a man ever had. So, a man may have a wife whom he could wish to be better or more beautiful or more agreeable. Still, she is his wife and, by the constitution of nature and the ordinance of God,

a part of himself. In neglecting or ill using her, he violates the laws of nature as well as the laws of God.”

Never one to mince words, John Calvin puts it even more bluntly: “Every man by his very nature loves himself, but no man can love himself without loving his wife (talking about this passage cause she’s a part of him). Therefore, the man who does not love his wife (John Calvin writes) is a monster, an abnormality of nature, deformed.”

Now here again in this picture of our treatment of our own bodies, Paul particularly identifies a couple of qualities of how we are, how we do love our own bodies, our own flesh, that we should copy in how we love our wives. He borrows two words, nourish and cherish. He borrows them honestly from the nursery as we’ll see; that is, from newborn nursery. Both of these words are filled with warm, tender affection. So, as he gives us this picture to tell us how we ought to love our wives, he tells us first how we love our bodies using these two words and from that says this is how we should love our wives as well. The first quality of love we learn from this picture is that our love for our wives should be a nourishing love, a nourishing love. Notice what he says: “no one ever hated his own flesh, but (what?) nourishes it...” This is what we naturally do to our bodies. We nourish our bodies. And therefore, we should nourish our wives as well. That’s Paul’s point.

This language was often used, by the way, in the first century to refer to marriage. In one marriage contract that’s been discovered in the papyri, a man in the first century promises this to his wife in this marriage contract: “to cherish, nourish and clothe her.” So, Paul takes this language, and he informs it Biblically and sanctifies it for our understanding and for our lives as believers.

So, what does this mean? Look at the word “nourish,” this nourishing love we’re to have. This word “nourish” occurs in only one other passage in the New Testament and it’s right here within a few verses. It’s 6:4, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up (there’s the same Greek word translated “nourish” back in verse 29 - bring them up, rear them, nourish them, provide for them) in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” The word literally means, the word “nourish” literally means to feed, to provide, to nurture or to care for. So, let’s take the idea “provide.” That’s basically the concept behind this word. We do this for our bodies, don’t we? That’s Paul’s point. We nourish our bodies. There are countless examples of how we do this. We’re very careful to meet all the needs we perceive our bodies to have. Not many of us have missed many meals. In the same way that we feel the weight of providing for the needs of

our bodies, we should feel the responsibility to provide for our wife's physical needs. That's Paul's point with this word "nourish." We are to meet the physical needs of our wives, all of her physical needs. What are those? Well, there are several passages that speak to this issue. You don't need to turn there, but in Exodus 21:10 and 11, the law of God is giving some instructions.

As we'll see next week, polygamy was never God's intention. Always from the beginning, it was to be one man, one woman, for life. But because it was a reality, the Word of God prescribed certain laws pertaining to it. And in the law pertaining to that, listen to what it says a man owes his wife. It says: "If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. If he (if he) will not do these three things for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money." In other words, she's free. If he won't provide for her these physical needs, then he's not being a husband to her. That's the point. And the three things listed there are food, clothing and conjugal rights.

We come to the New Testament, we see the same sort of themes hit. Look at 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 7. Paul begins here to answer some questions, a series of questions the Corinthian believers had asked him. He's responding to them. And so, in 7:1,

"Now concerning the things about which you wrote...." One of the things they wrote; is it true that it's good for a man not to touch a woman? They had raised that issue. He's going to respond to it. And he launches into a discussion of the fact that there are two kinds of gifting. There's the gifting for marriage. There's a gifting for singleness. And both of them are God's gift, and it's okay to be either depending on what you were gifted to do and to be. But if you're married (verse 3), "the husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband." We're talking here about conjugal rights. We're talking about the sexual relationship in marriage. Verse 4,

The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. [Here Paul makes it very clear that one of the physical responsibilities, one of the physical needs of a wife that a man is to meet are her sexual needs, conjugal rights.]

The same thing is true when it comes to the needs of food and clothing. Turn over to 1 Timothy 5. Here it's in the context of caring for widows, what widows should be put on the list, what widows shouldn't be put on the list. And he basically says if a widow has children or grandchildren, then they need to care for her. But then he concludes with this sweeping statement in 1 Timothy 5:8, "If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Men, we are responsible to nourish our wives, to meet all of their physical needs. That includes food and clothing, their, the conjugal rights of marriage. We are responsible to meet their needs.

William Hendriksen writes, "Paul is not thinking only of supplying the body with barely enough food, clothing and shelter to enable it to eke out a mere existence. He refers instead to the bounteous, elaborate, unremitting and sympathetic care we bestow on our own bodies. Are you miserly, men, with how you care for your body? Then don't be miserly with how you care for your wife." That's the point.

Now there's a couple of practical implications to this responsibility to nourish our wives. One of them is this, men: in the sight of God, we are responsible to provide for our wives. I understand. There are times when the wife becomes crucial to supporting the family. Early in life when you're pursuing education, that can sometimes be true. Other times in life, there are hardships. You're out of work. You're unable to provide for your family. You need all of the members of the family to pitch in and help provide what they can. But husbands should feel the weight of the responsibility. We should see ourselves as the provider. This means that we don't construct our budget so that we perpetually depend upon our wife's income and financial support. Instead, we should support them. That's the idea.

We sin against our wives when we fail to nourish them in this way, to provide for them, when we're lazy and fail to work hard to provide for them, when we spend our families into needless debt to fund some lifestyle choice, when we're miserly in what we give our wives. There are some men who say, "Here, honey. Here's five dollars. Enjoy getting the groceries for the week." When we force our wives to simply fund a lifestyle we want, we force them to work to fund this lifestyle that we want but we don't need and we can't really afford. When we make those choices, we are not nourishing our wives. Christ calls us to love our wives with a nourishing love.

Now that brings us to the second quality that our love should have, that grows out of this picture of how we treat our own bodies. Not only do we nourish our bodies, but we cherish them, Paul

says. And our love for our wives then should be a cherishing love. Look at verse 29: “for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it. . . .” We don’t use the word “cherish” very often. The word, the Greek word literally means “to heat or to warm, to keep warm.” Used metaphorically, it means to tenderly care for. The only other time in the New Testament this word occurs gives us a great word picture. It’s in 1 Thessalonians. Turn over to 1 Thessalonians 2. Paul is describing his ministry among the Christians there in Thessalonica. And he says when we were there (this is verse 7 of 1 Thessalonians 2), “we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother ‘tenderly cares’ (there’s the same Greek word translated ‘cherish’ back in Ephesians 5, as a nursing mother ‘cherishes’ her own children, as she ‘tenderly cares’) for her own children.” Paul’s point is, back in Ephesians 5, that’s exactly how we treat our bodies. We baby our bodies. Can I put it that way? We pamper our bodies.

Think about how much time we spend doing just this kind of thing with our bodies. Consider how much time, men, you spend every day eating, sleeping and, as you get older, getting ready. You know, with each new year, there’s another potion, another lotion, another gel you have to add to the routine. And then add the hours some men spend at the gym. Now I confess to you that I don’t spend enough time at the gym. But if you want a real indication of how much men cherish and tenderly care for their bodies, just watch them at the gym. Or better yet, watch them watching themselves at the gym, you know, in those huge mirrors on every wall. Honestly, it’s embarrassing.

The question is, men, do we cherish our wives? Do we take tender care of them? Do we pamper them? Do we baby them? Do we invest that kind of time and effort and energy in them that we do in ourselves? You know, increasingly, men in our culture are finding new ways to pamper and cherish their bodies. When I was growing up, there are activities popular today that at that time would’ve gotten you laughed out of the locker room. They’ve now become acceptable, things like plastic surgery for men to make parts look better, hair removal, hair restoration, makeup, manicures, pedicures. We baby our bodies. We pamper them. We tenderly care for them. The question men, is, do you do the same with your wife? Do you cherish her? Do you pamper her the way you pamper your own body? You see, our responsibility before the Lord doesn’t stop with providing for them. There was a time when, particularly last century, when it was kind of like, “Well, I’m her provider. I’m giving her what she needs. She ought to be happy with that.” Christ isn’t happy with that. It’s not enough. You need to cherish her and care for her with the same tender affection that you show your own body or that a nursing mother shows toward her newborn child.

We fail to cherish our wives, and we sin against them when we neglect them. It's all too common. We neglect our wives for work, to make our reputation greater, to get the kudos, to have more money coming in. We neglect them for work. Sometimes we neglect them for play, for sports and hobbies or hanging around with our male friends and going golfing, whatever it might be. We neglect this responsibility to cherish our wives when we're angry with our wives. And as we learned in Ephesians 4, this can go one of two directions, anger can. It can either be the kind of anger that blows up or the kind of anger that clams up. Some men get angry, and they boil and fume, and then they blow up, and there's this major eruption and everybody in the house knows. Other men become sullenly silent and sulk away. Either one is anger, and we are not cherishing our wives when we do that.

We are not cherishing our wives when we ridicule them, belittle them or abuse them with our words. In fact, you want to see what cherishing looks like just a little more? Turn to First Peter because Peter develops this idea just a little more in 1 Peter 3:7. He expands this concept of cherishing love. First Peter 3:7, "You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered." Notice if you want to cherish your wife, it starts by living with her in an understanding way. This is something we have to learn how to do. We have to learn her.

Alexander Strauch writes: "Some men don't seem to have a clue about how to treat a woman. They are insensitive to their wife's needs and feelings. They can't understand their wife's frustrations and hurts. They think only of their own careers and self-fulfillment. They exhibit incredible selfishness and callousness. They are capable only of making women suffer. These men need to repent and seek counsel and study God's Word on Christian husbanding."

By the way, the opposite reaction of growing in an understanding of your wife is becoming embittered. Paul mentions this in Colossians 3:19, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them." Many men don't work at understanding their wives, and so they become embittered against them. You want to cherish your wife? Live with her in an understanding way.

The other thing he tells us here as far as cherishing is, show her honor. You see that? The second way to cherish her is to show her honor. This means you honor her in your mind and attitude. You think about her in a way that honors her and you speak well of her to others and to her. You honor her in your speech. Strauch writes again: "Too many husbands make their wife feel

worthless and unappreciated. They take her for granted. They intimidate, humiliate, criticize and put down their wife.” Men, can I just say if that’s the tact you’re taking with your wife, that’s not Christian behavior. That’s pagan behavior. It’s even worse than pagan behavior because there are men who are unbelievers who treat their wives better.

Now Peter gives us three reasons for cherishing our wives here. He says because she’s the weaker vessel. That isn’t a condescending statement. That’s just a physiological reality, but understand this. Weaker is not a flaw if it’s part of the design. Think about a fine china teacup. It’s weaker than a stainless-steel mug, but who wants to go to high tea and have a stainless-steel mug? God created woman with these differences. It’s not a flaw. It’s God’s design.

Another reason he gives us is because she’s a fellow heir of the grace of life. In other words, men, she is your spiritual equal before God. And then he says, “so that our prayers won’t be hindered.” Listen. When we don’t take these instructions seriously, we open ourselves up to God’s discipline. Let me just make a comprehensive statement that is absolutely true based on what Peter says here. A Christian husband cannot be mistreating his wife and be a spiritual man at the same time. I don’t care how much theology you know. I don’t care how many verses you can spout. It’s an impossibility. God isn’t even listening to your prayers, Peter says. So, we’re to be working at understanding them, showing them honor or, as Paul puts it back in Ephesians 5, cherishing them as we do our own bodies.

Why? Go back to Ephesians 5. Because it’s how Christ treats us. Look at verse 29: “just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.” Christ thinks of the church as His bride, as His wife and therefore as a part of Himself, as a part of His body. I love this because He doesn’t just think of the church collectively that way. Notice Paul changes in verse 30 to the individual members, each member, each of us individually. This is how Christ thinks of us. Every Christian Christ regards and nourishes and cherishes. There’s never a moment that goes by that we are not experiencing, Christian, the nourishing, cherishing love of Jesus Christ.

How does He show us that cherishing love? Well, I’m going to develop that some next week, but let me just give you one. One way Christ cherishes us is by telling us again and again that He loves us. You notice that in Scripture? Just look here in Ephesians. In fact, just look in Ephesians 5. Notice verse 2, “Christ loved you and gave Himself up for you....” Verse 25, “Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her....” Verse 29, “He nourishes and cherishes you....” He doesn’t hate you. He loves you, cares for you. Over and over again, the Scripture is telling us that Christ loves us. Back in chapter 3, Paul prayed, “God, help them to see and understand the love

that Christ has for them. ” You and I, husbands, should be expressing our love to our wives in the same way. We can cherish our wives by expressing our love, by telling them. Many men find it difficult to do this, you know. They’re like the guy who said, “Listen. I told you when I married you that I loved you and if I ever change my mind, you’ll be the first to know.” That’s not how Christ behaves toward us. He cherishes us by telling us again and again and again of His love.

I love the story that comes from the last century about a hundred years ago. There was a formal banquet in London. And those attending, it was all the leaders of, of England at the time. And those attending were asked to respond publicly to this question, each in turn: “If you could not be who you are, whom would you most like to be? ” You know, that was a sort of icebreaker. It was a way for them to explain some great figure from history that they found admirable. And they each went around the table and shared whom they would most like to be, but everyone was waiting for one person.

And as it turns out, he was the very last person that night to respond. It was none other than the inevitable Winston Churchill. He was there with his wife Clemmie, and he’d had the whole time that this was going on to think. When it came his time, he arose, and he said this: “If I could not be who I am ... (and you know, with his flourish for the dramatic, he paused dramatically at that moment.) If I could not be who I am ... and he leaned over, and he grabbed his wife Clemmie, his beloved Clemmie’s hand, he said, I would most like to be Lady Churchill’s second husband.” I don’t think Churchill was a believer, but I think he understood what it meant to cherish a woman.

Men, we’re to treat our wives with tenderness. We’re to be courteous to them. We’re to treat her more like we did when we were dating. Tell her how much you appreciate her. Praise her. Express your love to her. Cherish her like Christ does us. So, there’s the standard, men. Here it is. Our love for our wives, it’s to be self-sacrificing. We are to put her needs above our own. What needs? Her physical needs, we’re to nourish her. Her spiritual needs, we’re to sanctify her. We’re to have a sanctifying influence in her life. And with what attitude are we to try to meet both her spiritual and her physical needs before we meet our own? We’re to do so with a cherishing love. We are to meet her needs with the same spirit of gentleness and eagerness that a nursing mother has toward her newborn child.

That’s the standard. It’s a pretty high standard. In fact, it’s an impossible standard. The question isn’t do you meet it in perfection? The question is, is it evidenced in your life that it’s the direction you’re heading? Not perfection, but direction. Can your wife see progress toward these

goals? How do you get there? Well, it goes back to verse 18 of chapter 5. The only way is to be under the influence of the Spirit of God, filling us with the Word of God so that that begins to bear out in our lives. God takes the word you've heard as we've worked our way through this passage and it begins to actually influence the decisions you make. Think about it. Meditate on it. And ask God to give you a determination to begin to live these things out very practically this week, today, tomorrow in your marriage for the honor of Jesus Christ and for His glory.

Let's pray together.

Father, it is an impossible standard. We acknowledge that. But we ask that You would forgive us for not even caring. Forgive us, O God, for our selfishness. Forgive us for being oriented so much toward what we want that we haven't even paused to think what You want or what our wives need.

Father, I pray that You would help us to be Christian men. May we be those who love our wives increasingly with this kind of love. Father, may we love them sacrificially. May we put their needs above our own. May we love them in a sanctifying way so that we're a positive spiritual influence in their lives and never a detriment. Father, I pray that You would help us to love them with a nourishing love that provides for them, that cares for them, that meets their needs, all of the physical needs You've given them. And Father, may we love them as well with a cherishing love, an attitude, a disposition that delights in them, that pampers them, that gently, tenderly cares for them with the same delight that a nursing mother does her newborn child.

Forgive us, O God, for anything less and give us the resolve to pursue these things our entire lives or until Christ returns.

For it's in His name we pray. Amen.