

## ***Just as Christ Loved the Church . . .*** **A Study in Biblical Husbandry**

Ephesians 5:25-27

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; 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.*

### ***Husbands love your wives . . .***

The word husband is derived from the Saxon words “house” (*hus*) and “farmer or cultivator” (*buend*). A husband is one who has charge over a home in order to ensure that it produces. This definition is useful in reminding us that husbands are to manage and care for the home in the hope that the wife and children of the home (the products) are healthy and profitable. To take the analogy even further, the good husband is producing a crop of “seed corn” which will be used to plant other fields, namely the homes of his children. Husbands, you should ask yourself this question, “could I make a living as a husband, or would I starve due to my barren fields of neglect?”

“To the woman He said, ‘I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be your husband and *he shall rule over you.*”<sup>1</sup> From the beginning of man’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden, God established the husband to rule over the wife. Husbands can be good rulers or bad rulers; they are, nevertheless, the rulers. Feminism, irresponsible fathers, and tyrannical husbands do not change the established fact that God made the husband the head of the wife and the rest of the household. Paul confirms this principle when he writes, “but I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of every woman is man, the head of Christ is God.”<sup>2</sup>

Husbands are the rulers of their households as Christ is the ruler of the Church. Christian husbands can tend toward one extreme or the other. Some husbands tend to neglect their God given responsibilities in the name of “love.” These men abdicate their responsibilities to their wives. They neglect the spiritual training of the wife and the children, they allow the wife to administer discipline when he is available to administer it himself, and sometimes they even place the burden of providing for the family upon the wife’s shoulders. These men grunt behind the upheld newspaper while the home decays around them. He flips the channels with the television remote while his wife hears the children’s prayers and tucks them in bed. His Saturdays are filled with golf while hers consist of dropping the children off at activities spread all over town. His Sundays are “his day of rest” while her Sundays are sometimes spent alone in church. By the time he wakes up from his spiritual slumber, the children are lost, the wife is exhausted, bitter and overbearing and the home has the hollow ring of a vacant cathedral turned into a museum.

The opposite extreme is the husband who leads as a tyrannical ruler in the name of “authority.” These men see their family as their little corporation or platoon. They

overpower the wife with demands and over manage her assigned duties. The children become accustomed to stifled expression and the wife learns to be the passive “little woman” of the home.

Neither of these two extremes are the appropriate expressions of love. Paul commands us to love our wives as Christ loved the church. Christ does not neglect nor does he overwhelm the church.

***Just as Christ also loved the Church . . .***

How we love our wives defines how we believe Christ loved the Church. A husband must seek to be like Christ if his wife is to be like the Church. So we ask ourselves the question, “How did Christ love the Church?” Consider the following expressions of Christ’s love for the church, which should be the same expressions of love of husband to wife. To help us remember the ways Christ shared His love for the Church, I have organized these components of love by the acrostic S.H.A.R.E. I.T. (Sacrificial, Honoring, Active, Responsible, Educational, Intimate, Transforming):

**Sacrificial** – You men who have been married for a while know how difficult it is to do things for your wife that you do not like to do. Your wife likes to snuggle up close to you while you are in bed; you hate sweating profusely and suffering from heat exhaustion. Your wife loves to spend Saturday mornings doing yard work; you wish you lived in a parking lot. Marriages work when two people sacrifice for each other. They fail when two people keep expecting the other to sacrifice for them. Sacrifice always involves giving something up.

Jesus loved the church so much that, for its benefit, He became the very thing He hated the most, and that was sin.<sup>3</sup> He redeemed us with His blood<sup>4</sup> and he became a curse for the sake of our blessing.<sup>5</sup> That is how much Jesus sacrificed for His church! His example makes running out to the grocery store for your wife seem rather insignificant does it not?

**Honoring** – Paul commands, “Husbands love your wives, and do not be embittered against them.”<sup>6</sup> Paul implies that bitterness is the opposite of love. Further, he recognizes that husbands will be tempted to be bitter toward their wives. The stewing pot of bitterness is guaranteed to boil over and destroy the marriage. The counter attack to bitterness is honor. Bitterness brings one down, honor elevates.

One of the chief ways bitterness is manifest is through the use of sarcasm. Humor should never, ever be made at someone else’s expense. When a husband jokes, “take my wife . . . please,” he has wounded her spirit at the same time he has calloused his own. Never make jokes about her cooking, her appearance, her parents, her . . . anything! Because men are by nature competitive, they often use sarcasm as a way of humbling their opponent. It is a puny little man who takes advantage of the very one who has sworn to love, honor, and obey him for life. Your wife is not your opponent.

Another way of honoring your wife is through the use of public praise. According to Proverbs 31, the husband of the excellent wife, “Praises her, saying ‘many daughter have done nobly, but you excel them all.’”<sup>7</sup> Notice the healthy comparison between this man’s wife and the “other daughters.” Fathers should always affirm their wives in front of the children. Remember, you are training your children in marriage as they observe yours. One little way we do this in my family is when I hug Nancy, I will sometimes say to the children, “Guess what children?” They respond in unison as if they were a trained choir, “you love our mother.” I learned this form of public honor from my parents who are about to celebrate their 44<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Our wives are attacked with a barrage of negative cultural messages daily: “You are too fat,” “You need this car,” “your husband has ring around the collar.” She needs to hear you tell others, “I would marry my wife all over again.”

In our culture, husbands should always open the door for their wives. They should do the heavy jobs of the house and those jobs that might be an excessive burden. You honor your wife every time you take out the garbage. Husbands should also stand when the wife is seated and they should ensure that the children do so. A man rarely stands taller than when he stands for a lady.

Both male and female were made “in the image of God.”<sup>8</sup> That is, God’s image can be seen clearly in both men and women. God, while a masculine Father, has also placed His more feminine traits of nurturing and compassion into the souls of mankind. When a man faithfully provides for his family, we see God. When a woman tenderly cuddles her newborn babe, we see God.

The Church has recognized the equal value of man and women from its inception. Paul states that in Christ there is “neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>9</sup> Peter declares the truth that men and women are “fellow heirs of the grace of life.”<sup>10</sup>

Men and women are equal in value but different by design. We honor our wives by recognizing their femininity. Peter tells us, “you husbands live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, this verse is one of the first scriptures that would be “highlighted in black” in the Bible of a feminist. According to feminist dogma, where scripture and tradition do not speak to women’s experience, or speak in such a way as to demean women, they are not authoritative.” It has been the church’s neglect of such verses as 1 Peter 3:9 that has contributed to feminism. Women who are sufficiently honored in the home do not feel the pull to seek honor outside the home.

Notice that the penalty for not honoring your wife is hindered prayers. This is a very serious penalty for your deficiencies in loving your wife. Your neglect literally results in a diminished ability to commune with God. God is perfectly willing to come to your wife’s aid. If you believe that your prayer life has been weak lately, I imagine your wife knows the reason why.

Christ honors wives by using them to describe the glories of heaven and the church, “the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”<sup>12</sup> Our marriages should reflect the image of these glories on this earth. To honor your wife is to communicate the same value God has for her, a value that finds its expression in the glories of heaven.

**Active** –The church today is under a curse of sloth. Men believe that they can get great results in spiritual matters without putting forth effort. Coach potatoes simply do not love their wives as Christ loves the church. Luke tells us in the opening of Acts that he wrote his gospel account about “all that Jesus began to do and teach.” Jesus’ love for the church had feet! He did not wait for the people to come to him; he went out and found them. He sought out the woman at the well in Samaria. He went to the Temple to find God seekers. He canvassed the countryside, the hill tops, the fields, the villages and the lake shores to seek out those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. After His resurrection, He did not tell His disciples to hang out in Jerusalem and wait for the pagans to search you out, He told them to “Go therefore” He also said to “make,” “baptize” and “teach.”<sup>13</sup> Jesus did not even wait for you to “commit your life to Christ;” rather, “He chose us.”<sup>14</sup>

Think about how much effort you put forth in maintaining your body. You give it eight hours of sleep, you feed it three meals a day (plus snacks), you bath, shave and brush it, you exercise, dress and fill it with information. Those who do not do these things will find that they have damaged their body due to inactive maintenance. Christ said, “Husbands ought also to loves their own wives as their own bodies.”<sup>15</sup> Your love is to be an active love. You say, “I tell my wife I love her every anniversary.” Do you eat just once a year? Enough said.

**Responsible** – Isaiah tells us, “Surely OUR griefs He himself bore, and OUR sorrows He carried . . . He was pierced through for OUR transgressions, He was crushed for OUR iniquities; the chastening of OUR well being fell upon Him, and by His scourging WE are healed.”<sup>16</sup> Notice that these were not Jesus’ griefs, sorrows, transgressions, iniquities, or well beings. They we OURS yet He took them upon himself. Why? Because He loves the church. Husbands, you are the God-ordained rulers of your households. You are the covenant (or representative) head of your household. Everything that happens in your family is your responsibility. While your wife or children may be guilty of a sin, you are responsible for that sin because they bear your last name. This principle is so important that the condition of the household is considered when determining a husband’s qualifications for holding church office, including being a pastor.<sup>17</sup>

Your wife has small, soft sloping shoulders. They were designed for bearing children, working at home<sup>18</sup> and for helping you.<sup>19</sup> You have large, straight, muscular shoulders. They were designed for work and for bearing responsibilities. Stop putting your responsibilities on your wife’s shoulders! If she feels a burden to provide for the family, she needs to quit her job and y’all need to lower your lifestyle. If she is the defacto spiritual head of the house, replace her by retooling yourself with the Word of God. If she is insecure and fearful, you are not protecting her from the world the way you should.

She may be an ace with the checkbook and gifted in paying the bills, but you are responsible for every bounced check and blown budget item. You are not in competition with your wife. Support her by easing her of responsibilities that God never intended her to bear.

**Educational** – You are your wife’s pastor. You need to be devoted to teaching her the Word of God in your actions, attitudes, and in your words. Christ sanctified the church, “by having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”<sup>20</sup> You are to do the same with your wife because you are to “love your wife as Christ loved the Church.” Paul assumes that husbands will have the skills and the initiative to teach their wives when he gives instructions regarding a woman’s conduct at church, “and if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home.”<sup>21</sup> Are you teaching your wife at home? How often do you have devotions? If she has a question, will she think of coming to you first? Do you model the Word of God for her in your behavior? You need to ask yourselves these questions. Better yet, ask your wife these questions. Let your wife learn to look forward to Thursday school as much as she does Sunday school.

**Intimate** – Paul tells us in Philippians, “Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but EMPTIED HIMSELF, taking the form of a bond-servant.”<sup>22</sup> We could not fully relate to a Spirit so He became a man. The Son got personal. The Son got intimate. He loves the church with an intimate love.

Most marriage relationships start off with intimacy but over time they can grow cold. Over time the head-spinning infatuation of the honeymoon should grow into a mature, sober and firm love of commitment. Hopefully we will transition from giddiness to godliness in our love for our wife. However, too many husbands see the wife of their youth as merely a business partner in the rearing of children. A partner who, of course, they can sleep with. Your wife should be your dream partner, not your law partner! Know your wife’s heart, be her best friend, and sweep her away with your love. Prince charming may be getting a little pudgy and gray over the years but he does not have to give up being a prince.

**Transforming** – Christ is about the business of transforming sinners into saints. He demonstrates His love for the church by ever working to improve her.<sup>23</sup> The church reflects the glory of this transformation as it positively influences the world.

Similarly, husbands should be about the business of transforming their wives through love. Your wife should be more radiant than she was when you first got married. I can often tell how good a husband a man is by the glow (or lack thereof) on his wife’s face. Radiant wives reflect the glories of a husband abandoned to his wife’s welfare. Husbands, does your wife glow with the image of your love or does she reflect the remorse and detachment of an emotional widow mourning a stillborn romance? We gauge the intensity of the sun and its affect on our skin by using a Sun Smart index on a scale of intensity between one and ten. How is your wife’s glow these days? Is she a nine or is she a three? A few years ago there was a popular song containing the line, “the

future is so bright that I have to wear shades.” You wife’s radiance should be so bright that you, and others, have to wear shades.

***That He might sanctify her . . . That He might present . . .***

The husband is responsible for all the problems in a marriage not because they are “his fault” but because he is the husband. As Christ “assumed” responsibility for our sins, so does the husband for the sins of the household.

Job would rise up early in the morning after his children feasted and would offered a sacrifice for each of his children; “for Job said, ‘Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.’”<sup>24</sup> It was said of Job, “Thus he did continually.” Job prayed for his children every day because he recognized his responsibility as head of the household. So was Job some kind of parental martyr? Not at all, indeed God praises Job for the act stating the he was “blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil.”<sup>25</sup> Job realized that it was his responsibility to “present” his family to God. What Job realized has been often forgotten in the modern church.

In a similar vein, the Holy Spirit, speaking through the apostle Paul, says that Christ “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.”<sup>26</sup> Christ could present the church spotless and cleaned because, like Job, he took responsibility for their sins. However, unlike Job Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice of Himself for the Church.<sup>27</sup> You are to do the same for your wife, as you love her “as Christ loved the church.”

Adam’s sin passed onto every one of his children.<sup>28</sup> Achan’s sin of taking booty under the ban at Jericho led to the death of his entire family.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Korah led a rebellion against Moses and his family paid for their father’s sin with their lives.<sup>30</sup> Today, we know that the children of an alcoholic are more likely to become alcoholics than the general population. Sins of the father do indeed pass on to their children, sometimes with deadly consequences.

The good news is this, that righteousness is also represented in the head of the household. All believers are “Children of Abraham”<sup>31</sup> the Righteous. God expects husbands to present their wives to Him in righteousness. Like the father of the bride who escorts his daughter to her husband waiting at the altar, we husbands “give our wives hand in marriage” to Jesus. How she looks to Him on that day has something to do with how you have loved her, and given yourself up for her, and sanctified her, and cleansed her with the Word. The goal is that she should be holy and blameless.

**So What is a Man to Do?**

Joshua made a public proclamation, as head of his household, that, “as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.”<sup>32</sup> This proclamation was not made by Joshua’s wife or by his church but by him. Husbands, have you been found lacking as a husband? Are you a “Spiritual Eunuch” leaving the spiritual leadership up to your wives? Does your wife seem to be constantly trying to “fix” you? If so than you need to heed Paul’s command

from his Mars Hill sermon in Acts 17; “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to all men that all everywhere should repent.”<sup>33</sup>

- ◆ First, go to God and your wife and confess your personal deficiencies and sins.
- ◆ Second, go to God and your wife (and maybe your children) and confess your deficiencies and sins as head of the household.
- ◆ Third, confess and do not blame. This is not a time for you to point out your wife’s deficiencies (even if she asks).
- ◆ Fourth, begin the process of becoming a Biblical husband by assessing the problems, developing solutions, implementing changes, and maintaining accountability. Do not “wrestle back” territory you have surrendered to your wife. She will gladly surrender territory she has had to take once she realizes that you are earnest in your desire to be an Ephesians five husband.

### **A Living Sermon**

There are very few of us who possess the spiritual gift of preaching. Nevertheless, God has commanded each husband to preach a 24-hour, seven-day per week sermon. The husband’s text is his own love for his wife, his illustrations are the faces of his wife and children, his congregation is the world and his pulpit is his home. Husbands, everyday you preach this sermon. You preach it well or you preach it poorly, but make no mistake about it, you daily preach this sermon on love. How well you preach largely depends on how much you love your wife. Are you loving your wife as Christ loved the church? Are you giving yourself up for her that she might be sanctified? Are you cleansing her by washing her with the Word? Can you present her to God in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle? Does she reflect the countenance of one who is holy and blameless before God? This, husbands, is your calling. Preach the sermon well. Love you wife as Christ loved the Church.

We gratefully acknowledge the work of Mr. Gary Ezzo of Growing Families International and the Rev. Douglas Wilson of Christ Church - Moscow, Idaho, whose publications were used in the writing of this booklet.

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- <sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:16
- <sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:3
- <sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21
- <sup>4</sup> Galatians 3:13
- <sup>5</sup> Ephesians 1:7
- <sup>6</sup> Colossians 3:19
- <sup>7</sup> Proverbs 31:28-29
- <sup>8</sup> Genesis 1:27
- <sup>9</sup> Galatians 3:26-29
- <sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 3:7
- <sup>11</sup> 1 Peter 3:7
- <sup>12</sup> Revelation 21:2
- <sup>13</sup> Matthew 28:19-20
- <sup>14</sup> Ephesians 1:4
- <sup>15</sup> Ephesians 5:28-29
- <sup>16</sup> Isaiah 53:4-5
- <sup>17</sup> 1 Timothy 3:4-5
- <sup>18</sup> Titus 2:5
- <sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:9
- <sup>20</sup> Ephesians 5:26
- <sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:35
- <sup>22</sup> Philippians 2:5-11
- <sup>23</sup> Romans 12:1-2
- <sup>24</sup> Job 1:5
- <sup>25</sup> Job 1:1
- <sup>26</sup> Ephesians 5:27
- <sup>27</sup> Hebrews 10:19-22
- <sup>28</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:22
- <sup>29</sup> Joshua 7
- <sup>30</sup> Numbers 16
- <sup>31</sup> Romans 9:8
- <sup>32</sup> Joshua 24:14-15
- <sup>33</sup> Acts 17:30