

Dec 22, 2018

Ephesians 5:25-33

We Need Grace: Marriage Part II: Husbands

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Today we are finishing our **two-part series** on **marriage**. Last week I spoke to the wives and this week I'm speaking to the husbands. If you missed last week, I'd encourage you to **go back** and **listen** to it because tonight's sermon is **half the story**. Even if you're not a wife, it's helpful to understand the **wife's role**, or if you're not married how you can **encourage** your married friends or **prepare** for marriage. Husbands, I'd encourage you to listen to it because I say things about **marriage** in that sermon that I don't in this one.

I want to make a couple **remarks upfront** on this sermon. **First**, like last week, I'm trying to tell you **what the Bible** says because God's **word** matters most. **Second**, although I've been married for **six** and a **half years**, I'm a **slow learner**. I have **not arrived**. So I don't preach this sermon from a place of having it all **figured out**, but as someone who is also on a **marriage journey**. Let me pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this opportunity to examine your plan for husbands in marriage, how we can love and care for our spouses in the best way possible. God, we want our marriages to be according to your plan and to reflect Jesus' love for the church. Help us hear you today. Amen.

At **crossfit** we have a **workout** of the day (a **WOD**). So every day the workout is mapped out for us. Every day there are two levels of weights listed, one for men and one for women. For example, on **Friday** men and women both had to do the same workout involving **deadlifts**. A deadlift is when you pick a bar up from the ground to about midway up your **thighs**, till your **back** is **straight**. The weight for women was **155 pounds** and the weight for men was **225 pounds**, and we each had to pick up that weight a bunch of times.

Now **why** am I bringing this up outside the **obvious reason** that crossfit is **amazing**? Because this **biological reality** reflects a **spiritual reality**. Because God created men and women with **different capacities** in marriage. **Both** lift a **lot of weight** and **work incredibly hard**, both are an **equally valuable** member of the **team**, and both **give 110%**, and yet in marriage God has built and called husbands to lift **more weight**.

The wife's role takes **three verses** to describe (v21-24). The husband's takes **nine verses** (v25-33). The husband's section is **three-times** as long as the wife's section. Why is that? Because God gives husbands a **heavier role** in marriage. He calls wives to **submit** to their husbands (a **heavy** and **hard** task) and he calls husbands to **lay down their lives** for their wives (a **nearly impossible** task).

Husbands, love your wives completely sacrificially. (Eph. 5:25-27)

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

This word for "love" is the Greek **verb agapao** (ἀγαπάω). This kind of love is **different** than **eros**, which is **sexual love**. Agapao love may include that **kind** of **intimacy** but that's **not** its **primary motivator**. Agapao is related to the **noun** for love, **agape** (ἀγάπη). We watched an animated **word study** earlier tonight on agape by The Bible Project. Their **big point** is that agape love "refers to a way of treating people that was defined by Jesus himself: seeking the well-being of others regardless of their response."¹ We see that **theme continued** here. Husbands are to love their wives by seeking **their best regardless** of their response. Paul gives Jesus gives himself as an **example**. As husbands, we are to love our wives at **cost** to ourselves just like Jesus loved the church at the cost to himself. Here's the call to husbands.

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

Come and die with Jesus. (v25)

As the Pastor martyr **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** said to all believers, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”² Like Christ sacrificed himself for the church we are to lay down our lives as a **living sacrifice**.

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (ESV)

This call in Romans is a **general call to all Christians**, men and women, but Paul especially emphasizes **self-sacrifice** when he addresses men in marriage in Ephesians. If Jesus gave up his life for the church, and the church is full of broken people **marred** by **sin**, then we should love and serve our wives despite any **imperfection** we encounter in them. This is a call to **unconditional love**, not love based on how **submissive** or **obedient to God** they are, but love based on how **sacrificial** Christ was.

If you listened to last week’s sermon and **thought**, “Wow, I get to be the **leader**” then you are right. But what does Jesus call you to lead in? You’re to **sacrifice the most**. Gary Thomas writes in *Sacred Marriage*:

The very definition of the word sacrifice means that sacrifice isn’t sacrifice unless it costs us something; so men, it’s a fair question for you to ask, “How have I loved my wife in the past two or three weeks in such a way that it has cost me something – vocationally, financially, and with my hobbies, time, or comfort?”³

Yes our wives are **also** called to come and die with Jesus too. But as husbands we are called to come and die **first**, to lead the way **to the cross**. We all sacrifice in marriage, but husbands should **sacrifice the most**. But what’s **our aim** behinds this? Paul actually gives us our **goal** or **purpose** in the next few verses.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her **26 to make her holy, cleansing her** by the washing with water through the word, **27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.**

Your highest goal is her holiness. (v26-27)

Look at why Jesus laid down his life on the **cross** for his bride the church. What was his purpose? To **save** her from her **sins**. To make her **holy**. To **cleanse** her. To one day present her before himself as a **pure** and **spotless** bride ready to **spend eternity** with him (Rev. 21:2). Husbands, **why** we lay down our lives for them is because we want **them (and us)** to grow in holiness, which means **becoming** more **like Christ**.

Sometimes as husbands we swap **happiness** for **holiness**. We don’t want our wives to be holy. We want them to be happy. Because if they’re happy **we’re happy**. Instead of being willing to **sacrifice** our own happiness and our wife’s happiness to address sin in **her life** or **ours**, we take the **easy route** and don’t say anything. This comes from us not wanting to **lay down** our lives. We don’t want to **be uncomfortable**. We don’t want to have the **hard conversations**. We don’t want to go through the **self-examination required** of our **own sins** in order to **address our wife’s sins**. That’s our **selfishness** and **disobedience**. But **what** would it look like if we were **more concerned** with **our wife’s** and **our own longterm holiness**, even at the cost of our **short-term happiness**? We’d be willing to have the **hard conversations** and show **patient love**. The **irony** is the **more holy** we become the **more happy** we will actually **become**.

Holiness goes beyond just **addressing sin**. We can **cultivate** our wives’ holiness, “by the washing with water **through the word**.” Paul uses this same Greek word for “word” (rhema) in Romans to speak of Christ.

Romans 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. (NIV®)

God calls husbands to wash their wives (and I think this applies to families too) in the word of God—the message about Jesus. What’s **one way** you can **cultivate** your **family’s holiness** by washing them in the word **this week**? Over **dinner** you could practice our **Foundation Verse** (Luke 2:11). You could tell your wife what **you’re learning** in your personal time of **study** and **prayer**. You could do **family devotions** in the **morning or evening**. On **Christmas morning** you could read through the **birth story** of Jesus Christ **before** opening presents. You could remind your family of the **gospel message**—that Jesus Christ **loves** them, **forgives** them, and is making them **pure** day by day. *Your highest goal is her holiness. Husbands, love your wives completely sacrificially.* Now here’s my **next point**.

Husbands, love your wives completely selfishly. (Eph. 5:28-31)

Now this is pretty **exciting**. The Bible gives us **permission** to be **selfish** in our marriages, **right**? Yes we have to sacrifice, but our marriages are really about **satisfying** our **wants** and **needs**, right? What do I mean by loving our wives “selfishly?” You’ll see what I mean in our next couple verses.

28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— **30** for we are members of his body.

Care for her like you care for yourself. (v28-30)

Paul’s call here isn’t to treat your wife **poorly** if you treat yourself poorly or to put your needs first. His call is really to treat your wife **at least as well** as you treat yourself, or even **better**.⁴ I think the **ESV** has a better translation. A husband should “**nourish**” and “**cherish**” his wife. Paul uses this word for “cherish” in **1 Thessalonians 2:7** to describe a “nursing mother” **caring** “for her children.” I love this little **nugget**. It’s like Paul is saying, “Husbands, be **like a mom** to your wives. **Man up** and **be maternal!**” Be **attentive** to her every need. Be **completely selfish for her** and not for yourself.

Gary Thomas gives a **powerful example** of a husband loving his wife this way in *Sacred Marriage*.

*Four-time All-Pro NFL linebacker **Chris Spielman** had played football for twenty-six of his thirty-three years. [...] He met his wife, Stefanie, in 1983 when he was just seventeen years old. They were married six years later [...] and the two embarked on a rich marriage. Spielman played for many years with the Detroit Lions and then signed with the Buffalo Bills in 1996.*

The year 1997 came with a fistful of trials. In July, just as preseason camp was getting started, a doctor spoke the grave diagnosis: breast cancer. Stefanie [...] opted for a mastectomy, to be followed by six weeks of chemotherapy, a time period during which she would lose all her hair.

The Spielmans had two small children under the age of five, and Chris knew the chemo treatments would drain his wife’s energy. He had a decision to make. “It was my test,” Chris said in a magazine article. “It was my defining moment.”

In a show of solidarity, Chris shaved his head. Even more important, he quit football — not forever, but for a year — until Stefanie was back on her feet. If you’re not a football fan, you may not realize the astounding sacrifice this act represented. The average career span of an NFL linebacker is less than three years. The fact that Chris took an entire season off left him with no guarantee he’d ever get back to doing what he loved so much — playing football.

“[Stefanie] always supported me 100 percent,” Chris explained. “I had to offer it back.” [...]

Instead of watching game film and meeting with the coaches, Chris woke up early to feed the kids (he learned that his oldest hated to have any of the food on her plate touch any other food), and then he got Stefanie up an hour or so later and served her breakfast. He then did the laundry, took the kids to their gymnastics lessons, and made sure Stefanie got her medication.

Clearly, Chris had learned the meaning of sacrificial giving to his wife. Somehow he'd learned to live out what Paul urges husbands to strive toward in Ephesians 5:25 — loving their wives, just as Christ loved the church, and he explains quite explicitly how Christ loved the church: by giving up his life for her.⁵

Be completely **selfish** for her. *Care for her like you care for yourself.*

Care for her by prioritizing her above others. (v31)

31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”

I don't want us to miss **several key** points in verse 31. Paul is quoting **Genesis 2:24**, which means he is affirming that the **model** for marriage laid down in the **opening chapters of Genesis** is the **model** God has given humankind **for all time**. This means that God **designed marriage** to be between a **man** and a **woman**. He also designed it to be for a **lifetime**. God doesn't want **divorce** to tear-apart the **one-flesh union**. But I also think there's something in verse 31 for husbands specifically, which the **KJV** brings out.

Genesis 2:24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (KJV)

God calls husbands to **prioritize** their wives over their **family of origin**. Husbands, you are called to **separate** from **dependency** on your **father** and **mother** and to “cleave” to your wife. **Leave and cleave!** To cleave means to **stick to** something. Husbands, you can't **stick to both** your **father** or your **mother** and your **wife**. You **can't treat** them **equally**. Something that can cause a lot of **friction** in a marriage is when a husband gets married but acts like a **dependent child**. Your **wife** must come **before** your **mother** and your **father**. Part of being the “**head**” of the household is forming a **new household**. (Eph 5:23).

So **why** do we love our wives “selfishly”—caring for her like we care for ourselves and above others? We do this because this is how **Jesus** cares for us, the **church**. Last week we didn't focus on it enough, but Ephesians **5:23b** said, “...Christ is the head of the church, his body...” Paul **repeats himself** in the second half of verse **29** and **30**. He says Christ cares for the church, “for we are **members** of his **body**.” When we love our brides this way, and your **bride** is a member of the church, we're actually **loving Christ's body**. You are **loving Jesus** by loving your wife. In fact...

A Christ-centered marriage illustrates a greater reality. (Eph. 5:32-33)

32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. **33** However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

John Piper showed me this point.⁶ When Paul was writing about marriage, he didn't go searching for a **nice illustration** and find it in **Christ** and the **church**. What verse 32 tells us is that actually **marriage is about Christ** and the **church**. Christ and his plan to love the church is **illustrated by marriage**. Human marriage is like a **small black and white photo** of the **Sistine Chapel**. A black and white photo can take a picture but it doesn't capture the **overwhelming glory**. Marriage is a picture of a **far greater reality** than marriage itself.

Christ Jesus and his plan to love and rescue and care for the church came **long before** God ever made **Adam** and **Eve**. Remember back in Ephesians 1 how God chose us, the church?

Ephesians 1:4a For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. (NIV®)

The **Father** chose the church to be his **Son's bride**. The Bible is the story of a **bride running away** from the **altar** into **sin** and **brokenness** and the Son **going after her** to **rescue her** and make her **beautiful** and **sacred**. As husbands, we got to realize that **we can't rescue** our brides from their sins just like we can't rescue **ourselves**. But we can **point** them **time and time again** to the one who can rescue us, **Jesus Christ**. Jesus can make us **holy**. Jesus can make us **new**. Jesus can **forgive** every sin and **make** our marriages a **reflection** of his **love** for his **bride**, the **church**. *Husbands, love your wives like Jesus.*

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes further endnotes and references. Click to listen to [sermons](#) or to read [our story](#).

¹ *Word Study: Agape - "Love"* The Bible Project. Published Dec 21, 2017. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slyevQ1LW7A&t=2s> Accessed 12/20/2018. Quote from description of video.

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1054687-the-cross-is-laid-on-every-christian-the-first-christ-suffering> Accessed 12/20/2018.

³ Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Marriage* (p. 170). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

⁴ According to Monica Romig on 12/20/2018, Dr. Gordon Hugenberger uses the illustration of cleaning your intimate parts in the bathroom. After you've used the bathroom you don't clean yourself with sandpaper, do you? No! You would never do that. You clean yourself up with soft gentle paper. So if you wouldn't clean yourself with sandpaper don't clean your wife up with sandpaper. Clean her up gently and softly, with love and care.

⁵ Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Marriage* (pp. 168-169). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

⁶ *Desiring God. Ephesians 5:22-32 // The Meaning of Marriage*. Youtube. Published Sep 11, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mOxUtzA9I0> Accessed 12/20/2018.