

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Read Ephesians 5:25-33

Introduction

Further to what we studied about submission and responsibility last week, Ephesians 5:21-33 is an ideal, of course, not always where we start, but where we are headed. This is not a Scripture to use to beat over your wife's or husband's head, but for us as individuals to learn from and pattern our own lives after. To the degree that a husband is loving and trustworthy, a wife is able to submit more fully and trustingly. To the degree that a wife is loving and submissive, a husband can care for her and lead the family to a better way of life. As we imperfect spouses stop blaming our spouse and seek to be what we are supposed to be in Christ, then – gradually – Christ can bring about the beautiful marriage that Paul describes here, a marriage that patterns itself after the marriage of Christ and his church.

The simple command to Christian husbands: “Love your wife”.

“Husbands, love your wives...” (v25a)

Paul’s words to Christian husbands safeguards his previous words to wives. Though wives are to submit to their husbands, it never excuses husbands acting as tyrants over their wives. According to 2 Timothy 1:7, God has given us the spirit of power – but also of love. Power, in their Christian life, is always to be exercised in love. It is not naked power, it is not the power of a dictator or a little tyrant, it is not the idea of a man who arrogates to himself certain rights, and tramples upon his wife’s feelings and so on, and sits in the home as a dictator... No husband is entitled to say that he is the head of the wife unless he loves his wife... So, the reign of the husband is to be a reign and a rule of love; it is a leadership of love.

Paul used the ancient Greek word *agape*. The ancient Greeks had four different words we translate **love**. It is important to understand the difference between the words, and why the apostle Paul chose the Greek word *agape* here.

1. *Eros* was one word for love. It described, as we might guess from the word itself, *erotic* love. It refers to love driven by *desire*.
2. *Storge* was the second word for love. It refers to family love, the kind of love there is between a parent and child or between family members in general. It is love driven by *blood*.
3. *Philia* is the third word for love. It speaks of a brotherly friendship and affection. It is the love of deep friendship and partnership. It might be described as the highest love of which man, without God’s help, is capable of. It is *fondness*, or love driven by *common interests and affection*.
4. *Agape* is the fourth word for love. *Eros*, *storge*, and *philia* each speak about love that is *felt*. These describe “instinctive” love, love that comes spontaneously from the heart. Paul assumes that *eros* (desire) and *phileo* (fondness) are present. Christians should not act as if these things do not matter in the marriage relationship. They do matter. But Paul’s real point is to address a higher kind of love, *agape* love. *Agape* describes a different kind of love. It is a love more of *decision* than of the *spontaneous heart*. It is as much a matter of the *mind* as the *heart* because it chooses to love the undeserving.

The word has little to do with emotion; it has much to do with self-denial for the sake of another.

- It is a love that loves without changing.
- It is a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting re-payment.
- It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing.
- It is love that loves even when it is rejected.

Agape love gives and loves because it wants to; it does not demand or expect repayment from the love given. It gives because it loves, it does not love in order to receive.

We can read this passage and think that Paul is saying, “Husbands, be kind to your wives.” Or “husbands, be nice to your wives.” There is no doubt that for many marriages this would be a huge improvement. But that isn’t what Paul wrote about. What he really meant is, “**Husbands, continually decide to practice self-denial for the sake of your wives.**”

The standard and example of a Christian husband’s love.

“... just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” (vv25b-27)

Jesus’ attitude towards the church is a pattern for the Christian husband’s love to his wife. This shows that the loveless marriage doesn’t please God and does not fulfil His purpose. This is love given to the undeserving. This is love given first. This is love that may be rejected, but still loves.

Just as Christ also loved the church: We might say that Paul taught two things at once here. He taught about the nature of the relationship between husband and wife, and he taught about the relationship between Christ and His Church. Each illustrates important principles about the other.

1. It demonstrates that Jesus loves his church with a *special* love. Jesus loves the world and died for the world; but just as a husband can have a general love for everyone, he must also have a *special* love for his bride.

Let us take notice of what is not always the case with regard to the husband and the wife, that *the Lord Jesus loves his church unselfishly*; that is to say, he never loved her for what she has, but what she is; no, I must go further than that, and say that he loved her, not so much for what she is, but what he makes her as the object of his love. He loves her not for what comes to him from her, or with her, but for what he is able to bestow upon her. His is the strongest love that ever was.

2. Using the love of an ideal husband as a pattern, we could say that Jesus has a *constant* love for His people, an *enduring* love for His people, and a *hearty* love for His people.

And gave Himself for her: Jesus’ action towards the church is a pattern. This helps us define what *agape* love is all about: it is self-sacrificing love. How should a husband love his wife? As Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. What did that involve? Perhaps the best statement concerning that matter is in Philippians 2:5-8, where it shows that the focus of Jesus was on the church. It was for the church that He did what He did, not for Himself.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

This word is especially needful for husbands who see headship in submission with worldly understanding instead of godly understanding. Some husbands think that because God said they are the head of the

home and the wife is obligated to submit to them that they do not have to be humble, lay down their lives, and sacrifice for the benefit of their wife. They need to understand the difference in thinking between worldly headship and godly headship.

- Worldly headship says, “I am your head, so you take your orders from me and must do whatever I want.”
- Godly headship says, “I am your head, so I must care for you and serve you.”
- Worldly submission says, “You must submit to me, so here are the things I want you to do for me.”
- Godly submission says, “You must submit to me, so I am accountable before God for you. I must care for you and serve you.”

When Jesus gave Himself for the church on the cross, it also provided cleansing from every stain sin makes. Since the work of Jesus on the cross comes to us through the Word of God and the preached word, it can be said that we are washed of water by the word. Obviously, a husband cannot spiritually cleanse his wife the same way Jesus cleanses the church. Yet a husband can take an active, caring interest in his wife’s spiritual health. As the priest of the home, he helps her keep “clean” before the Lord.

The application of the principles to the duty of a Christian husband.

“So, husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.” (vv28-29)

Paul gave three reasons for a Christian wife’s submission to her husband. In addressing the Christian husbands, Paul also gave three reasons to love their wife:

1. First, they should love their wife this way because this is what love is. Paul indicates this in Ephesians 5:25: Husbands, love your wives.
2. Second, they should love their wife this way because the relationship between husband and wife has a pattern: the relationship of Jesus and His church. Paul indicates this in Ephesians 5:25-29: Just as Christ also loved the church... So, husbands ought to love their own wives... just as the Lord does the church.
3. The third reason is found in Ephesians 5:28-32. The Christian husband must love his wife this way because you are one with her, just as Jesus is one with the church.

So, husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies: The single word “as” is important. Paul did not say, “So ought men to love their wives in the same way as they love their bodies.” That would be an improvement in many cases, but that is not the meaning. The meaning is, “So ought men to love their wives because they are their own bodies.” The Apostle puts it in this form in order that a husband may see that he cannot detach himself from his wife. You cannot detach yourself from your body, so you cannot detach yourself from your wife. She is a part of you, says the Apostle, so remember that always.

Husbands, love yourself:

Simply said, when you love your wife, you benefit yourself. Perhaps it is better to put it in the negative: when you neglect your wife, you neglect yourself, and it will come back to hurt you. We all know what it is like to neglect something – like a noise or a maintenance issue on a car – and it comes back to hurt us. Husbands, it is even more true regarding your wife, because she is part of you. Only a fool neglects his

own broken arm or infected leg; yet there are many foolish husbands who hurt or neglect their wives and they do and will suffer from it.

For no one ever hated his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes just as the Lord does the church it: Any man in his right mind is going to take care of his own flesh, even if it is just in the sense of feeding and clothing and caring for his own body. He knows that if he doesn't, he is going to suffer for it. In the same way, once we know the Biblical fact of this unity, if we are in our right minds we will nourish and cherish our wives because she is part of us.

The principle of oneness also is dominant in the relationship between Jesus and His people.

- *There is oneness of life:* We share the same vital resurrection life that resides in Jesus Himself.
- *There is oneness of service:* We are privileged to be co-workers with our Lord.
- *There is oneness of mutual necessity:* We cannot exist without Him, and He cannot exist without us, in the sense that a redeemer is not a redeemer without any redeemed; a saviour is not a saviour without any saved
- *There is oneness of nature:* The same genetic code links us with our Saviour, and we are partakers of the divine nature
- *There is oneness of possession:* We share in the riches of His glory both now and in the age to come
- *There is oneness of present condition:* When our Saviour is lifted high, so are His people with Him.
- *There is oneness of future destiny:* We will be glorified with Him.

The union between Jesus and the church, and its relation to marriage.

“For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” (vv30-32)

Paul here brings the analogy back in a circle. First, the relationship between Jesus and the church spoke to us about the husband-wife relationship. Now the marriage relationship speaks to us about the relationship between Jesus and His people. Paul quoted this essential passage from Genesis 2:24. Relevant to marriage, it shows that just as the first man and the first woman were one – she was taken from him, and then brought back to him – so it could be said of every married man today that he is joined to his wife. God did the joining. Husbands can resent it, they can resist it, they can ignore it, but it doesn't change the fact.

Conclusion

“Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” (v33)

The theme of unity in Ephesians offers a great deal to help our marriages. Unity and love are the underlying themes of this passage. But this is bigger than just me and my wife or you and your husband. "This is a profound mystery," says Paul, "but I am talking about Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32). The principles which underlie our marriages, also underlie Christ and his church: love, honouring uniqueness, and celebrating unity. We all must voluntarily submit to Christ, whether or not we happen to like it at the time.

This passage began with a call for mutual submission: *"submitting to one another in the fear of God."* (Ephesians 5:21). The form of our submission may be different as our roles are different. For the wife this submission takes the form of "respect." For the husband this submission means loving his wife so much that he gives up his selfishness to help her and strengthen her.

