

Virtues of a Godly Man – Part 2

Ephesians 5

Dr. David Harrell

Last Sunday was Father's Day and because of that I believe that God had stirred within my heart to speak to you about matters pertaining to the virtues of a godly man, and therefore we stepped away from our exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, and, again, this morning will be the second part in this series on virtues of a godly man. I would encourage you to take your Bibles and turn to Ephesians chapter five. Before I read the text let me frame my thoughts a bit for you.

Several months ago I was with friends of mine and one of the men asked me, "Dave, why is it that Christians have a higher divorce rate than any other group of people?" I gave him my answer which I will give you in a moment. He was basing this on a recent study by the Barna research group. The survey found that 11 percent of the adult population is currently divorced, 25 percent of adults have had at least one divorce during their life time and divorce rates among conservative Christians were significantly higher than for other faith groups and much higher than Atheists and Agnostics experience.

And it is interesting. George Barna, the president and founder of the Barna Research Group commented as follows and I quote, "While it may be alarming to discover that born again Christians are more likely than others to experience a divorce, that pattern has been in place for quite some time. Even more disturbing, perhaps, is that when those individuals experience a divorce, many of them feel their community of faith provides rejection rather than support and healing." Then he went on to say something very interesting. "But the research also raises questions regarding the effectiveness of how churches minister to families. The ultimate responsibility for a marriage belongs to the husband and wife. But the high incidence of divorce within the Christian community challenges the idea that churches provide truly practical and life changing support for marriages," end quote.

Now my response to him was really two fold in terms of why. My first answer was basically this: Scripture makes it very clear that most people who profess to be Christians are not. Therefore most people who are in these particular groups they survey really have never been born again, therefore they do not have the Spirit of God dwelling within them. Therefore they have nothing within them to restrain the flesh, and many of them become disillusioned with their so-called "faith" recognizing down deep that there is an emptiness. And certainly hypocrisy will inevitably lead to conflict in any and every relationship.

Then my second answer was similar. I believe based on Scripture, and even experience, that the vast majority of Christian churches are pastored or shepherded or have priests that are nonbelievers, and they, along with their flock, do not consider the Bible to be their spiritual authority. Therefore they are not taught the Word of God. They do not obey the Word of God. They are not held accountable to it. And as Scripture tells us, we are living in the Laodicean age of apostasy where Christ is on the outside of the church knocking, wanting to come in.

So I agree with Barna, however, with one statement that he made, that churches must provide truly practical and life changing support for marriages. And, beloved, the only

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way we can do that is to immerse ourselves in the Word of God. So, once again, we will do that this morning.

Let me read the passage before us that we began with last week and then we will look at some of the verses in particular with respect to this matter of virtues of a godly man.

Beginning in Ephesians five verse 18.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

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.

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 CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE 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 let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER** (which is the first commandment with a promise), **THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.** And, fathers, do not provoke your

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children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.¹

As we learned last week here in Ephesians, as well as in a parallel passage in Colossians three verses 18 through 22, God has spoken through his inspired apostle and has delineated, literally outlined, his design for the family. Wives are to submit to their husbands. Husbands to love their wives. Children obey their parents. And parents are not supposed to provoke their children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

And the dominant theme here is based on verse 18 as we learned last week. When we are filled with the Spirit, which is absolutely crucial, then we will submit. Submission is the theme in all of this. There is a mutual submission one to another. The family is to submit to the father. The husband is to submit to the needs of his wife, and the father is to submit to the needs of his children. Children are to submit to the authority of their parents, and parents are to submit to their children's needs to be nurtured and instructed in the Lord.

Last week I reminded you that God has given much more instruction to men, especially husbands, than he has to women. And the reason for this is because we have the enormous responsibility to lead our wives and our children and even the Church... remember marriage and the Church are the two institutions that God has ordained.

Moreover, the husband's love for the wife is to illustrate Christ's love for the Church. So our marriage is to literally picture Christ and the Church and to be an object lesson of the Church. Again, this is impossible apart from being obedient to verse 18, "to be filled with the Spirit" which literally means three things basically. We are to be completely under his control, we are to be permeated by him, and we are to be moved along by him as an invisible influence like the wind would fill the sail of a ship. Of course this fundamentally requires dying to self, a surrendering to the Spirit of God as he reveals himself to us through his Word.

Now, men, there are four commands that translate into four categories of virtue that we see in the text before us, and as I reminded you last week, it is crucial that we obey them in sequence because one builds upon the other. Each one is the consequence of the previous command. We are to be, number one, *filled with the Spirit*. That is what we discussed at great length last week. Secondly, *we are to love our wives as Christ loved the Church*. That is what we will look at today. And then next week, thirdly, *we are not to provoke our children to anger* and fourthly, *we are to bring them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord*.

So this morning we look at this issue that is so important for godly men to understand and that is we are *to love our wives as Christ loved the Church*. Notice verse 25, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her."²

¹ Ephesians 5:18—6:4.

² Ephesians 5:25.

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Now, men, this is fascinating. You realize that there is no such command given to wives, once again emphasizing both the profound importance of this priority in our life combined with the great need for us to be called to do that which we don't naturally do, at least in the way God would have us do it. Oh, yes, we love our lives. But our love for our wives is utterly eclipsed by Christ's love for the Church. And, frankly, until a man is amazed at the infinite love of Christ and honestly compares his love for his wife with Christ's love for the Church, he will never be able to grow in this crucial virtue and his wife will be banished to an island of disappointment, and sadly his children will be deprived of a Christ exalting model for their marriage and for their family.

Now to be sure, the love of Christ for his bride the Church exceeds our ability to comprehend. It even causes angels great intrigue. Yet this is our model, men, for loving our wives. And, as you think about it, here we are as men, as mere mortals, and we are commanded to emulate the Lord of glory. My, what an incredible thing when you think of that, to somehow imitate the sinless bride groom whose sacrificial love for his bridal church is so boundless that in verse 32 it is called "a mystery."

It is amazing to me as I think about it. You know, such a comparison is so far beyond the pale of human cogitation, of our ability to come up with something, that only God himself could ever present such a thing. Therefore, apart from divine enablement it would be utterly impossible for us to even come close to this. But, men, please hear me. Even though our limited intellects will only allow us to wade around in the shallows of this subject and perhaps some day in glory God will help us plumb more of the depths, we must remember that the Holy Spirit has put this in the Word for us to obey. Therefore there is automatically the assumption that by his power we can do so. So we can rejoice knowing that God never commands us to do that which he has not equipped us to fulfill. This is great encouragement. It animates great joy within me as a husband and hopefully it will do the same with you.

So in verse 25, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church."³ And, again, here Paul is continuing his dominant theme of mutual submission, the inevitable consequence of being filled with the Spirit. Here we have a call for a continual, habitual action, a lifestyle of love. And as we examine this text this morning and others that expand upon it, we must understand, first of all, how *does* Christ love his Church? Because if you don't understand that, you will never know how to imitate that in your marriage. And from this we learn that our love for our wives is to include, I believe, at least six virtues that imitate the love of Christ.

Let me give them to you and then I will elaborate on them. Men, our love is to be *singular, selfless, sacrificial, satisfying, sympathetic* and *sanctifying*.

First of all our love is to be *a singular love*. Again, in verse 25 it says that "Christ loved the Church," singular, "and gave himself up for her." Here we see a love of choice. The

³ Ibid.

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Church consists, we know, of a chosen people. In 1 Peter 1 we read how that we were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, literally “a fore loving.”

Foreknowledge speaks of a predetermined choice to set his love upon us, to establish an intimate relationship. And for this reason as we study the Scriptures we know that he came to seek and to save his elect, his chosen, and he died for them specifically. He died for them singularly and for them alone. Based upon his mercy, he has chosen to love some and he has passed over others. The choice made in eternity past according to Ephesians 1:4, simply “according to the good pleasure of his will and to the praise of the glory of his grace,” verses five and six.

And as we look at Scripture we see that Christ is a jealous bridegroom, jealous of his bride the Church. Now we must understand that we have an undeserved relationship to Christ and that relationship is unlike any other. For his love for us, dear friends, is a singular love. It is a focused particular and consummate love that a bride groom has for his bride.

When we come to salvation in Christ we are united to him in faith. In salvation there is an indissoluble union that is formed. There is oneness. We become one with him. Paul says in Ephesians four beginning at verse four:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.⁴

So in marriage we become one with our wife, singular. We do not join ourselves, therefore, relationally or physically to any other woman. If we do so, we defile not only the marriage union, but we also defile the union between Christ and those who are one with him. That is why the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians six verse 15, “Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot?”⁵ Certainly not. So in other words, men, our wives are to be our singular object of affection, of our most intimate affection.

In verse 31 Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 where you will see God established the institution of marriage, and he says, “FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER.”⁶ In the Hebrew it is literally “leave behind,” a new home, a new family is being established. Not only do you leave, you also “cleave,” it says, which means to be joined to or literally glued to what? His wife, singular. “AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.”⁷

Therefore, men, our love for our wife must be a choice to love here like no other and to love her alone as Christ loved the Church. Ours is to be a singular and unique devotion to her and her alone. And every aspect of our relationship with her must be radically

⁴ Ephesians 4:4-6.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:15.

⁶ Ephesians 5:31.

⁷ Ibid.

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different than any other woman and any other person on the planet. So our love must, first of all, be singular.

Secondly, it must be *selfless*. Now I confess, this is foreign to my flesh and it is foreign to yours. For we tend to primarily love another person for what we can *gain* rather than what we can *give*. Not so with Christ. Think about it. He *chose* to love an ugly, sinful, prideful bride, one filled with rebellion, one that he knew would be unfaithful and unsubmitive. This is a selfless love. He did not choose to love us because we were in some ways appealing or somehow worthy, because certainly we were not. In fact, we were spiritual cadavers unable to even respond to truth apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit of God. He loved us solely because it is his nature to love.

It is sad. Men many times marry primarily because the woman is attractive. And, gentlemen, I am not saying that that isn't an important aspect of a relationship. But it certainly should not be the most important because if you marry simply because of your wife's beauty, then in the years to come when that beauty begins to wane, you will be tempted to do as many men do and kind of trade her in for a newer more appealing model.

In marital counseling over the years I try to teach men in particular and women as well, but men to enter into the bond of marriage with an unconditional selfless love, not for what you can gain, but for what you can give; that your love has to be an act of the will. It has to be a selfless love. It has to be a deliberate choice in your heart whereby you choose to obey God's command to love her like he loves you.

Now, I ask you. When you think of Christ's love for us, what could he have possibly gained in loving us? He reigns supreme over all of his creation. He enjoys perfect fellowship with the Father and with the Spirit. He is perfectly worshipped by the angelic hosts. Why would he chose to love those creatures that he knew would be in rebellion to him? Well, the answer is: He simply loved us because it is his nature to love. This is a selfless love.

If I could add a footnote, I never really understood what selfless love was all about until I began to comprehend as a young man the doctrines of grace and the sovereignty of God. Then I began to realize that it wasn't because of anything that I did, but solely because of his grace that I was saved.

Now, I hasten to add, unlike the Lord of glory, we have much to gain from our wives. Were it not so the Lord would not have created Eve saying in Genesis 2:18, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."⁸ So God gives our wives to us, men, for the sheer joy of companionship, the delight of physical intimacy, for her ability to bless the family, to nurture our children, to be instruments of righteousness that even God uses to help us as men, as husbands, become more conformed to the image of Christ. And to be sure, as I think of my own wife, she is

⁸ Genesis 2:18.

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without question the most tangible expression of God's grace in my life. So our wives are to complement, not duplicate us. And these are all appropriate benefits of marriage.

However, all too often, men, we tend to see our wives as servants rather than as Peter said in 1 Peter 3:7, a "fellow heir of the grace of life," a spiritual equal before God. And, as a result of that we can begin to approach our wives as a servant expecting their life to orbit around our desires, to obey our demands, and so forth. But, men, you must understand, to love your wife as Christ loves the Church is to love her with no demand that she reciprocate. Now that is a wonderful desire, and you pray that she does, and you do all that you can to raise the probability that she will, but you make no demand that she do so because as soon as you do, you are not loving Christ as he loves you. Ours should be a selfless love. Frankly, it is the kind of love that Hosea had for Gomer. What a dramatic illustration that dramatized sin and unfaithfulness and judgment and forgiveness, a picture of selfless, unconditional love.

In marriage counseling over the years I have heard so many men and women for that matter say a variation of this statement: "Well, I just don't love her anymore." Or, "I don't love her like I used to." And my response based on the Word of God is: "No, you never loved her, period, not the way the Lord loves us and the way the Lord would have you love her." In 1 Corinthians 13:5 we read, "love does not seek its own." In other words, it is not selfish; it is selfless. Jesus said in Matthew 20:28 that he "did not come to be served," but to what? . . . "but to serve."

1 Corinthians 13 goes on to say, "love is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered." And how often do I hear people who are frustrated with their marriage repeat their list. It is like they have memorized it. And they can rehearse every offense that has ever been committed against them from years in the past, keeping the memory ever fresh, the wound always opened. That is not love. It's a man's glory to overlook a transgression.

"Love is not provoked. It does not take into account a wrong suffered. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." You see, men, we have got to understand that selfless love is a serving love as Jesus came to serve. We see that illustrated in him washing the feet of the disciples despite their selfishness and their pride and their bickering. And we learn that even when he returns to take us unto himself, you know, he will continue to serve us? This is an amazing thing. In Luke 12:37 Jesus said, "Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you..."⁹ Now catch this. "...that he will gird himself to serve, and have them,"¹⁰ referring to believers, "recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them."¹¹ Men, ask yourself. Is yours a selfless love dedicated to serving your wife or do you expect her to serve you?

⁹ Luke 12:37.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

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Our love must be *singular*. It must be *selfless*. Thirdly, it must be *sacrificial*. Here we move from attitude to behavior. Notice verse 25, we read that, “Christ gave himself up for the Church.” Now, friends, to think of even a few of the ways that he gave himself up causes us to just literally reel in dismay. This is utterly incomprehensible. Such condescension to our lowly estate is beyond our ability to grasp.

Think about it, though. In his incarnation we read in Philippians two that “he emptied himself and took upon himself the form of a bond servant.” Literally it is saying that he set aside his ineffable glory. He set aside voluntarily his divine prerogatives to do his Father’s will and “he humbled himself” in verse eight in Philippians two, “by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”¹² In Romans 5:8 we read, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”¹³ It is amazing. He laid down his life for our sins. He suffered untold agonies on the cross including being forsaken by the Father. Why? Because he chose to love those whom he had chosen to love, his Church. This is a sacrifice of total grace.

When you think about it, he did not give himself up for those who deserved it, but for those who did not. Still today he continues to give himself up. You realize that he is our mediator, according to 1 Timothy 2:5. He is the one that brings God and man together. He is the mediator of the new covenant. The Word of God says also that he is our intercessor. He is “making intercession for us as our high priest” as Hebrews seven tells us. He is our “advocate” before God’s bar of justice as we read in John 2:12. We even know according to John 14 that he is preparing a place for us and he is going to come back and take us unto himself.

Men, practically speaking God is commanding us to place the needs and the dreams and the aspirations and the opinions and the preferences of our wives above our own, to die to self, to voluntarily sacrifice ourselves for her joy and for her sanctification. It is tragic to speak with Christian women, as I have over the years, who express to me how they live in fear and loneliness. Many of them live as if they are always on duty. “Oh, be careful, kids. Don’t upset daddy. You don’t want to make daddy mad. Because, after all, his opinion is all that matters. His preferences, his schedule, his dreams, his agenda, his needs. . . .” Men, if that is you, that is a blatant violation of God’s command for you to love your wife as Christ loved the Church. And if you are living that way, I also submit to you that you are living under divine chastening and, as we studied last week, the Lord is not hearing your prayers because your marriage dishonors and distorts the covenant of marriage. As others look at that they don’t see what they are supposed to see.

1 Peter 3:7. Peter says, “You husbands likewise live with your wives in an understanding way as with a weaker vessel since she is a woman. Grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life.”¹⁴ Why? So that your prayers may not be hindered.”¹⁵ Again there we are called, men, to die to self and to humbly meet her needs as a weaker vessel, Again, I will

¹² Philippians 2:8.

¹³ Romans 5:8.

¹⁴ 1 Peter 3:7.

¹⁵ Ibid.

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remind you, though she is our spiritual equal, she is physically weaker and there is a whole unique set of needs that she has. And we are to subordinate our needs to hers.

To live with our wife in an understanding way means that we study her. We learn her fears and her weaknesses, her dreams, her opinions, her aspirations, and we basically ask the Lord, “Lord, help me to understand how I can be a blessing to my wife. Help me to understand how I can meet her needs and help her become more conformed into your image. Because that is the passion of my life.”

Antonio Stradivari was a master craftsman. He made the finest violins that have ever been made. They are unequalled in quality and in sound, especially the ones he made about between 1700 and 1720. They are worth millions of dollars. Someone has said when he gave his daughter away to be married that he felt like he was giving his Stradivarius over to a gorilla. And he meant no disrespect. But he wanted the young man to understand how important it is to treat that woman, his daughter, with the utmost care.

And it is an amazing thing when you think about it, that a Stradivarius violin, that priceless instrument, is utterly worthless in the wrong hands. But you give it to a person who is a master, who treats it with utmost care, who has spent hours and days and weeks and years learning how to precisely get the perfect sound out of that instrument, my, my, my . . . the sound of that violin will produce heavenly music that will bring great glory to God. Men, we must learn to play our wives as a master would play a great violin. This requires great sacrifice of time and energy, commitment.

It is fascinating to note in Ephesians five, once again in verse 28 where it says, “So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies.”¹⁶ Well, this is adding a new level to all of this. He goes on to say:

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.¹⁷

Now, men, I ask you. How do we treat our own bodies? What do we do when we are thirsty? What do we do when we are hungry? What do we do when we have something in our eye or we are hurt in some way? Obviously the point here is that we show enormous sensitivity to our own needs. Likewise we should do the same to our wife.

It is interesting he says that this person would nourish and cherish his body. Nourish is *ektrepho* (ek-tref'-o) in the original language. It is used no other place in the New Testament except in Ephesians 6:4 and there it is translated “bring them up,” referring to our children. We are to bring them up. So this idea of nurturing here, husbands, translates into this: we are to nurture our wives in every way, but especially spiritually. We are to

¹⁶ Ephesians 5:28.

¹⁷ Ephesians 5:28-30.

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bring them up, if you will, into spiritual maturity. We are to care for them, cultivate this in their life that they might be come more conformed to the image of Christ.

By the way, this translates, men, into *you have got to be a spiritual leader in your home*. Not only do we nourish, but we “cherish,” *thalpo* (thal’-po), again, in Greek it means “to show affection.” It literally means, “to warm with body heat.”

It is interesting. This same term is used in Deuteronomy 22:6 describing a bird that would warm her eggs or sometimes a male bird will do the same. You get the picture? It is also used in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 where Paul says, “But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother...”¹⁸ here it is. “...tenderly cares for her own children.”¹⁹

Men, what are an amazing picture of intimate, caring, sacrificial love. Now, guys, let me make it real clear to you. Don’t tell your wife, “Oh, sweetheart, I am willing to die for you,” unless you are first willing to die to yourself—that is where the real proof is—and then you dedicate yourself to nurturing her and cherishing her.

Our love must be *singular, selfless, sacrificial* and, fourthly, it must be *satisfying*. Now what I mean by this is that our pleasure, our greatest source of pleasure and joy and contentment must be in our wife. To put it differently, she must be our greatest source of delight this side of glory. As you think about it, is this not like Christ’s love for the Church? Does he not delight in us? Has he not called us brethren? Can you imagine that? The Lord of glory using such a term of endearment? And does he not speak of us as his beloved, as his chosen bride?

As I said earlier, has he not promised to prepare a place for us and to come and take us unto himself that where he is there we might be also? Has he not also promised a glorious marriage supper and a marvelous consummation? Has he not said in Psalm 16:11, “In Thy presence is fulness of joy; In Thy right hand there are pleasures forever”²⁰? Is this not how Christ loved his church, men? Does he not presently desire to have communion with us, to bless us, to converse with us through his Word? Does he not find joy and fellowship being with us? Obviously he does.

Likewise, men, this is how we are commanded to love our wives. Men, our greatest satisfaction in any human relationship on earth must be found in her, her alone. She must be our delight, our desire. She must be the one that we long to commune with more than any other and to converse with. In fact, men, I want you to understand that God has designed the oneness of marriage to literally picture this infinite reservoir of blessing that we have in him. We find our ultimate joy and contentment in him. Likewise, we should do so in the wife that he has provided for us, that he has united us to in the oneness of the covenant of marriage. But this will only happen if we are filled with the Spirit.

¹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 2:7.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Psalm 16:11.

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You show me a man who is uncaring and undisciplined, not spending quality time with his wife in communing with her and conversing with her, and I will show you a man who is uncaring and undisciplined in spending quality time and communing and conversing with his Lord. There is a direct parallel. In fact, when I look at a man's character, the main place I want to look is in his relationship with his wife. I don't care how much you go to church or how well you can teach the Bible or how many verses you can quote. I don't care about any of that. Where it really becomes practical is how do you treat your wife? And if you don't spend that type of care with your wife and find delight in her, then obviously you are not doing the same in the Lord.

Do you know what is going to happen, by the way? Your marriage will become boring. It will become unsatisfying, frustrating. Eventually it will become intolerable. Dear husband, let the full weight of this magnificent truth just cause you to drop on your knees in thanksgiving, to think that the Lord of glory delights in you and in your wife. He delights in the Church. And this is our model. Let this be our passion to find our greatest satisfaction, our greatest delight in loving our wives and therefore demonstrating our deepest desire for God who is the lover of our souls.

Our love is to be *singular, selfless, sacrificial, satisfying*. Fifthly, it is to be *sympathetic*. Christ is, according to Hebrews 4:14, our great high priest who has passed through the heavens. And in verse 15 it says, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses."²¹ To think that he sympathizes. In the original language the word means "to be touched by feeling." It means "to commiserate," "to have compassion for." In other words what it is saying is the Lord literally is touched by what we feel. He can enter into that. And why? Why is this the case? He goes on to say that he is one "who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore..."²² (in other words, or based on this) "...draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need."²³

Now this is hard to comprehend. But truly our Savior experienced every conceivable emotion that man could ever possibly experience. Moreover, because of his divinity, what he experienced, he did so with greater intensity than we could ever experience. Whether it was love or sorrow or temptation or testing or pain or joy, his highs and his lows were infinitely greater than ours could be. This is hard for us to comprehend and certainly we could never experience it, but literally this helps us understand how he loves us because he understands what we feel.

Now, men, obviously we can never have perfect understanding because unlike the Lord we could never experience all things. I understand that. But, men, all too often, I fear that our hearts become callous. What happens to our hands when we work them? The calluses become thicker and thicker and after a while we don't feel certain things. I know that because working with horses all the time, and ropes and those types of things, my

²¹ Hebrews 4:15.

²² Hebrews 4:15-16.

²³ Hebrews 4:16.

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hands are callused and when I go to the Mexican restaurant and they say, “Oh, don’t touch that plate it is hot,” I can touch it and I don’t feel it. I don’t feel much.

Men, many times our hearts can become that way. Years of struggle in the workplace, years of difficulty and frustration and disappointment, discouragement, maybe mistreatment and maybe even your own guilt over your sins . . . eventually what happens? We can become hardened to the needs of others, especially our wife. We can become calloused. Our heart like our skin becomes so callused it is trying to protect us so to speak, from any further abrasion. And then we lose our sensitivity to the needs of our wives and our children, and therefore we fail to be sympathetic to their pain. Then, sadly, what happens in the relationship? The wife gradually learns that “it is useless to draw near to my husband in time of need.” She loses her confidence in your compassion. Because, after all, she finds no mercy or grace to help in time of need. You see the picture, the parallel there?

I cannot count the times brokenhearted wives have expressed to me their profound disappointment in this regard—husbands who are absolutely oblivious to their pain. So many wives will spend all day caring for their children, washing their clothes and the husband’s clothes, cleaning house, preparing meals, etcetera. Many times they are exhausted. (By the way, I have had a lot of women tell me this is why they would much prefer to work outside the home, because it is so much more difficult to work inside the home). And yet what happens? Many times the husband comes home and all that matters are his needs, and the wife is longing to share her life in a meaningful way, but the husband has no sympathy because he has become calloused. He has become indifferent. He has become self-absorbed. Men, we must learn to become more like Christ in this area.

I have to laugh. Men, many times we are fearless with so many things. But put a wife on a porch swing in tears and suddenly you find men are absolutely paralyzed. It is like the most frightening thing on earth is to walk out on to that porch and sit down next to that woman and take her by the hand and look her into the eyes and say, “Sweetheart, help me understand how I can help.” I have told men things like that and they look at me like I have got three heads. But, men, isn’t that how Christ loves the Church, a sympathetic love?

Well, finally, men, our love needs to be not only *singular, selfless, sacrificial, satisfying* and *sympathetic*, but it needs to be *sanctifying*. This is a purifying, cleansing love. Notice in verses 25 through 27 there at the end it says that Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. Why?

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.²⁴

²⁴ Ephesians 5:26-27.

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You see, here we see the Lord's commitment to purify his bride. "Sanctify," in the original language *hagiazō* (hag-ee-ad'-zo). We get our word "holy" from that. It means "to set apart" or "to make holy" or "to purify." Now we know as we study Scripture that *sin is the failure to conform to the moral character and the desires of God*. And there we are all guilty. So we need something to happen. We need a cleansing. In fact, in the Bible we see sin likened to filthy garments, likened to the stench of a rotting corpse, likened to the venom of a viper, like the corruption of leprosy. Indeed, sin is, you might say, a vile, wretched, abhorrent toxin to a holy God.

But because of his great love, he not only forgives sins and remembers them no more, but he cleanses us from all unrighteousness. What does the prophet say? "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool."²⁵ Again, I go back to 1 Peter where Peter talks about us, how we are "chosen by the foreknowledge of God," and he says, "By the sanctifying work of the Spirit."²⁶ In other words when believers are first set apart from unbelief and sin unto faith and righteousness, this is sanctification.

If you will bear with me for a moment, technically there are three distinguishable phases of sanctification found in Scripture. We have, first of all, our *positional* sanctification where in our justification we are delivered from the *penalty* of sin and we have been declared righteous by God. But, secondly, we have a *progressive* sanctification. Now this is a process of being delivered not from the penalty, but from the *power* of sin. We see this illustrated in various places in the Bible including the Lord washing Peter's feet and so forth in John 13. But then, thirdly, there is the *perfected* sanctification which is the ultimate consummation of the process of sanctification where in glory we finally will be delivered completely from the very *presence* of sin eternally. And all of this begins with regeneration when we are born again by the Spirit, born by the Spirit, and that is why Peter is saying that there is "the sanctifying work of the Spirit."

Now notice in Ephesians five verse 26. There we read "he sanctifies." In other words, he cleanses, he purifies us. How? "By the washing of water with the word."²⁷ Literally, the spoken word of God. Remember in John 17:17 Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth."²⁸ All through Scripture we see that the *agent* of regeneration is the Holy Spirit and the *instrument* that he uses is the cleansing of the Word of God.

Men, what we glean from this—and this is so exciting—if we love our wives as Christ loved the Church, it means that our love will be a cleansing, sanctifying, purifying love. It will be one that absolutely abhors anything that might defile her. It is one that uses the Word to continually purify her. Practically speaking, we should never subject our wives to anything that would defile her, that would contaminate her, that would violate her virtue, that would in any way corrupt her moral purity. Men, we need to guard how our

²⁵ Isaiah 1:18.

²⁶ 1 Peter 1:2.

²⁷ Ephesians 5:26.

²⁸ John 17:17.

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wives look, how they dress, what they wear. We need to protect them from any form of temptation that would seduce them to sin.

And, of course, the key cleansing here, the mechanism is the Word. Practically, what does this mean? Men, we need to lead them in an understanding of the Word of God. Make sure that they are a part of Bible studies ... and we are teaching her and making her exposed to godly women and quality literature and sound doctrinal preaching. Don't allow her to get caught up in her domestic duties and child rearing and career to the point where she neglects these things. And why is this so important?

Real simple. Because you, men, are God's instrument of righteousness in the life of your wife. We are part of that process of sanctification. Why? Verse 27. "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."²⁹

Oh, dear brothers in Christ, would that we would get serious about learning to love our wives as Christ loved the Church, to have a love that is *singular*, that is *selfless*, *sacrificial*, *satisfying*, *sympathetic* and *sanctifying*. Oh, what blessings await those who are committed to these things.

By the way, men, again, stay committed to this whether she responds or not. You don't do this in order to guarantee that she will respond. That is between her and the Lord. You do this ultimately to obey him, and he will bless you regardless of her response.

So often men will say, "Well, I tried that and it is not working." Ah, your motive is all wrong. You are not doing it because you have got to get her to do something. You are doing it because you love the Lord and you are going to honor him first. But this will never happen, again, unless we are filled with the Spirit, seeking daily to surrender to him and to be like Christ. May he convict us and strengthen us to these ends.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these truths. Apply them to our hearts. Lord, grant that our wives be willing to help us as we struggle through these difficult commands. Lord, we thank you for them. And we thank you for the grace that they show us. Lord I pray for the marriages in this church that they would be honoring to you and be fulfilling to all who enter into them. Lord, may our children and may our grandchildren and great grandchildren and all those in the community see a picture of Christ's love for the Church as they look at our marriages.

And, finally, Lord, I pray for those who do not know you as Savior. Oh, God, would that you convict them of their sin and draw them unto yourself. May today be the day that they experience the glorious miracle of the new birth. For we ask this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

²⁹ Ephesians 5:27.

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