

The Spirit-Filled Husband

The late, well-known pastor Harry Ironside once had a recently married young man come to him and say, “I need your help.

I’m in an awful state. I’m drifting into idolatry.”

“What’s the trouble?” asked Dr. Ironside.

“Well, I’m afraid that I’m putting my wife on too high a plane. I fear that I love her too much and I’m displeasing the Lord.”

“Are you, indeed?” asked Ironside. “Do you love her more than Christ loved the church?”

“I don’t think so,” replied the young man.

“Well, that’s the limit,” replied Ironside, “for we read, ‘Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for her.’” (In the *Heavenlies* [Loizeaux Brothers], p. 281.)

As we study today about the role and responsibilities of the husband in marriage it’s important that we remember that the topic in this portion of Ephesians 5 is being filled with the Spirit. Paul gave the command in verse 18, “**be filled with the Spirit.**” Then he goes on to describe how that filling of the Holy Spirit works itself out in our relationships with one another. The main principle is in verse 21, “**submitting to one another in the fear of God.**” And chapter 5 verse 22 through 6:9 applies this principle of mutual submission to the relationships of wife and husband, parents and children, and slaves and masters.

We saw last week that wives are called upon to display the submission of the church to its Head, Jesus Christ by their submission to their own husbands. If wives are to reflect the submission of the church to Christ, what would you expect Paul to command the husbands to do?

I would have expected Paul to reason in this way: Husbands are to manifest the headship of Jesus Christ over His church, and thus they are to be the spiritual leaders of their wives. If the wives are commanded to submit, then the husbands surely must be instructed to lead. But they are not. Instead of commanding husbands to lead their wives, Paul instructs them to love their wives.

Let’s read his instructions to husbands:

Ephesians 5:25-33

- 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,**
- 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,**
- 27 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.**
- 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.**
- 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.**
- 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.**

- 31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."**
- 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.**
- 33 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.**

If you were to ask some Christian men, "What is your primary responsibility in the family?" many would reply, "To be the head of the home." If that's what you think, I say, "You're wrong!"

"But," you protest, "I'm the boss, aren't I?" No, Christ is the boss. Jesus alone is Lord of the family. I'm not minimizing the staggering responsibility of the position God gives to the husband. Scripture is clear that he is in fact the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.. What I'm getting at is, when the apostle Paul turns to the husband, he does not say, "*Husbands, be the head of your wives, even as Christ is the head of the church.*" Rather, he says, "**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.**" Thus

A husband's primary responsibility toward his wife is to love her as Christ loved the church.

The primary way a husband exercises his headship is through sacrificial love toward his wife. What does this kind of love look like?

I. A Husband's love is a SPIRITUAL Love (v. 25a).

Definitions of biblical words are important. We say, "I love pizza!" "I love baseball!" "I love my wife!" Great! But what does that mean? If you operate with a definition of love that you picked up from watching movies or listening to popular songs or reading romance novels, you will have the notion that love is some mysterious feeling that comes over you kind of like the flu, and when it goes away, there's not much you can do about it.

Some will say, "*I do feel a love for my wife.*" Feelings are a part of love, but real love is seen in action. It's the kind of love that Christ has for His church. As the "**head**" in our homes, God says, "**love your wives.**" The pattern is "**...as Christ also loved the church.**"

During the 1800's children had a "copybook" to use to learn penmanship. They traced and copies letters exactly as they appeared in the book. That's why when you examine writing from that era it all looks similar. Jesus is the "copybook" for all husbands.

1 Corinthians 13 describes the kind of love that Christ has for His church:

- 4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;**
- 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;**
- 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;**
- 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**
- 8 Love never fails.**

Here is a definition of that agape love: LOVE IS A SELF-SACRIFICING, CARING COMMITMENT THAT SHOWS ITSELF IN SEEKING THE HIGHEST GOOD OF THE ONE LOVED FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.

1 Pet.3:7 says, "**Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.**" Peter described the husband and wife sharing in "**the grace of life.**" When we spiritually love our wives, we grow closer, better, richer and deeper.

II. A Husband's Love is a SACRIFICIAL Love (v. 25b).

Jesus not only loved the church spiritually but sacrificially. He "**gave Himself for her.**" Jesus Christ didn't just sit on His throne in heaven and bark commands to us on earth. He didn't even come to this earth and sit on a kingly throne and give orders to us. At a personal cost that we can never fully fathom, He laid aside His rights as God, took on human flesh and became obedient to death on the cross, where He actually was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21)! "*Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou my God shouldst die for me!*" (Charles Wesley). Jesus' love is seen most graphically in His self-sacrifice for us on the cross.

How can husbands show sacrificial love to their wives?

A husband should GIVE ALL for his wife as Christ gave all for the church. Jesus gave His life for the church. Almost all of us would take a bullet for our wives and children, no hesitation. Though we would die for them, do we live for them?

Giving all will mean giving up your own rights, subordinating your own needs, and serving your wife. Sacrificial love means putting their needs and wants above ours.

John 13 gives us a picture of this kind of love. There John says, "**Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.**" So John sets up the story by telling us that Jesus is going to demonstrate complete love for His own.

Before we see how Jesus shows His love, John gives us two important pieces of information in verses 2 and 3: "**And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God.**"

First, Jesus knew that there was at least one person at the table who did not really love Him. Judas was full of the devil and was planning to betray Jesus. So Jesus is going to demonstrate this full kind of love even to one who absolutely doesn't deserve it.

Second, John tells us that Jesus was fully aware of His position of authority and power. "**Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God.**" What Jesus does to show His love requires Him to lay aside His own rights and privileges as the Lord and Son of God.

So how did Jesus show His love? Verse 4, He "**rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured**

water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded."

Jesus showed His love by being a servant, by sacrificially meeting the needs of His disciples. He served. He demonstrated what He said in Mark 10:44-45, **"And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."**

How do husbands demonstrate love to their wives? By sacrificially serving, as Jesus did.

III. A Husband's Love is a SANCTIFYING Love (vv. 26-27).

A Christian woman has been made positionally **"holy... without spot or wrinkle"** or **"blemish"** by salvation in Christ. However, she is practically sanctified and cleansed as she grows in grace and becomes spiritually mature.

Husbands, you play a major role in your wives spiritual maturity. As you become more like Jesus, as you portray godly ethics, your wife will follow your example. You are the head she is the body. You are **"one flesh."**

You see, for a husband to love for his wife is to actually cooperate with Christ in such a way that one day when they stand side by side as sister and brother, she will be presented along with the rest of the bride with her garment clean and spotless.

Jesus cleanses His church by the **"washing of water by the word."** Let me ask you, who takes the lead in your family in studying God's Word? Are you feeding yourself and your family the Word of God daily?

IV. A Husband's Love is a SATISFYING Love (vv. 29-33).

V. 29 says, **"No one ever hated his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it."** V. 33 says **"let each one of you love his own wife as himself."** This is the Golden Rule of matrimony.

Guys, we love ourselves. This is not narcissism, just common sense. We love our bodies. We clothe, shelter and feed them. We give them rest and medical attention... without even thinking about it! How many of you men when you accidentally smash your thumb with a hammer, look at the thumb and say, *"You stupid thumb! Why did you get in the way? You deserve to hurt for being so dumb! I'm going to hit you again, just to teach you a lesson!"* Right? Of course not! That would be crazy! And yet, that's how many men treat their wives. You don't do that to yourself. You tenderly care for that hurt thumb. It's part of your body.

So it should be with our wives. You are **"one flesh"** with your wife! When you hurt her, judge her, or criticize her, you do those things to yourself. When you bless her, praise her, thank her, edify her, love her—you do those things to yourself as well.

Love is growing, exclusive intimacy, not a casual relationship. Paul cites (5:31) Genesis 2:24, which lays the foundation of marriage as a one flesh relationship. When God instituted marriage, it was between a man and a woman, not between two people of the same sex, which is an abomination to God. It was also between one man and one woman, not between one man and many women,

whether at the same time or in serial fashion. Marriage is a great mystery, in that it is an earthly picture of Christ and the church (5:32). What is at stake in the definition of marriage is the picture of Christ and His Church!

Love is a permanent commitment, not a temporary arrangement. "Be joined to" (5:31) means, "to be glued to." That means when you get married, you're stuck! Marriage creates a new, one-flesh identity of head and body. It is the permanent commitment that enables a couple to work through difficulties, as every couple has to do. I advise every couple to remove the words "divorce" and "separation" from your vocabularies. Even in the heated emotions of a disagreement, never threaten to leave! As we have seen, marriage isn't just about our happiness. It's an earthly picture of Christ and the church. For a Christian husband to threaten to leave his wife when there is a problem would be like Christ threatening to leave His bride, the church. But (Heb. 13:5b), **"He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.'"**

CONCLUSION: Ladies, the greatest way to enhance your marriage is to show **"respect"** for your husband. A woman went to see a counselor and confided that she hated her husband, and intended to divorce him. **"I want to hurt him all I can."** **"Well, in that case,"** said the counselor, **"I advise you to start showering him with compliments. When you have become indispensable to him, when he thinks you love him devotedly, then start the divorce action. That is the way to hurt him."** Some months later the wife returned to report that all was going well. She had followed his counsel. **"Good,"** he said, **"Now's the time to file for divorce."** **"Divorce!"** the woman said indignantly. **"Never. I love my husband dearly."** (*Bits & Pieces*, 8-91).

A husband was listening to a tape where the speaker cited the biblical text about husbands being thoughtful of their wives. He emphasized that love is an act of the will. A person can choose to love. It convicted this husband, who realized that he had been pretty selfish and insensitive. So as he drove to join his family at their vacation cottage, he vowed that during the vacation, he would try to be a totally loving husband. No excuses!

His resolve was immediately tested. After the long drive, he wanted to sit and read, but his wife suggested a walk on the beach. He started to refuse, but then he thought, "She's been alone with the kids all week and now she wants to be alone with me." So he went for the walk on the beach.

So it went for two weeks. He resisted the temptation to call the Wall Street firm where he was director to check on things. He agreed to a visit to the shell museum, although he usually hated museums. He held his tongue when his wife's slow getting ready made them late for a dinner engagement. For two weeks, he kept his vow to choose to love his wife.

But on the last night of the vacation, as they got ready for bed, his wife stared at him with the saddest expression. "What's the matter?" he asked. Her voice filled with distress as she said, "Do you know something I don't?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well ... that checkup I had several weeks ago ... our doctor ...did he tell you something about me? You've been so good to me ... am I dying?"

After it all sank in, he burst out laughing and said, “No, honey, you’re not dying; I’m just starting to live!” (Adapted from Tom Anderson, Reader’s Digest [October, 1986], pp. 129-130.)

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (5:25). Do you love her even as you love yourself (5:31)? If not, your assignment is clear. Get started this week!

Humorist Sam Levenson says, “Love at first sight is easy to understand. It’s when two people have been looking at each other for years that it becomes a miracle.” But it’s not really a miracle. It’s a result of the deliberate choice to live in obedience to God and actively to love your wife as He commands. I encourage each husband to take a few minutes every day to ask yourself the question, “How can I actively love my wife today as Christ loved the church?” The answer for that day may be as simple as taking the time to listen to her concerns and to pray with her. It may mean taking the initiative to help her deal with household or family problems. It may mean reading the Bible together or taking a walk and talking. As you do it to please God, He will bless you with a joyous marriage.