

## Becoming Who We Are – The Book of Ephesians

Christlike Love  
Ephesians 5:25-30

Mark Vroegop

---

*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ 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, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their 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 Christ does the church, because we are members of his body (Eph.5:25-30).*

“We’re looking for a few good men.”

I can vividly remember this tag line from a television advertisement in 1980s. It featured the forging of a piece of metal into a sharp saber sword with an ivory handle. And as the camera pulled back, it became clear that the sword was fastened to the right hip of a chiseled, well-dressed Marine. With drawn sword held in front of the Marine’s piercing eyes, the TV ad made its point: “We’re looking for a few good men: The Marines.”

It was a compelling message. Even though it was almost 40 years ago, I can still see the Marine in my mind and hear the gravelly voice of the narrator.

But what do the Marines mean when they say, “a few good men”? The Marines have an identity, don’t they? What are some of the characteristics that come to mind? Valiant, strong, courageous, tough, honorable, and assertive are a few words that come to mind. The identity of being a Marine has some implied qualities.

That’s true of nearly every identity and role in our society. For example, imagine if you heard, “We’re looking for a few good counselors.” Or “a few good kindergarten teachers, football coaches, flight attendants, FBI agents, or professors.” Each of these has, in general, an identity with characteristics.

Let me give you another: “We’re looking for a few good husbands.”

What does that identity look like? It’s a really important question for two reasons.

First, since the family is the bedrock of the created order and society, how we answer that question has profound effects. I think it’s safe to say that being misguided about the role of husbands (and wives) leads to a dysfunctional family. Secondly, our culture creates an image, and it has a powerful effect on the attitudes and behaviors of people. In the name of entertainment, most films and shows depict

husbands as lazy, crass, entitled, ignorant, and self-centered. Ward Cleaver and Mike Brady have been replaced with Homer Simpson and Ray Romano.

Christian identity applies to every area of life – it transforms the most basic and essential roles in life. You learned this last week with Nate’s excellent sermon on submission. And this week we see how Christian identity applies to husbands.

Ephesians 5:25-30 helps us see that *Becoming Who We Are* creates husbands who love with Christlike unity.

In previous sermons we’ve seen how Christian identity has a morality. Identity without action is an illusion. This text is also about action, but with a particular focus on posture and attitude. And please don’t check out if you are not married or not a husband. In the same way that submission applies to every Christian, so too the kind of leadership that is highlighted here applies in many other areas as well. This is merely an application of Christian identity in one area.

### **A Command with Two Comparisons**

The primary command for husbands in this text is “love.” It is a sweeping command that applies in the broadest sense of the word. The word for love is agape. There are other Greek words that would have normally been used in Paul’s culture. Eros expressed sexual passion. Phileo highlights family love. But Paul intentionally uses a word deeply connected to the unique love created through Christianity.

This word for love is deeply connected to God’s love for his people as expressed through the sacrifice of Christ. Listen to how New Testament scholar, Francis Foulkes, describes the word:

“...love that is totally unselfish, that seeks not its own satisfaction, nor even affection answering affection, but that strives for the highest good of the one loved. This love has as its standard and model the love of Christ for his church. It means not only a practical concern for the welfare of the other, but a continual readiness to subordinate one’s own pleasure and advantage for the benefit of the other. It implies patience and kindness, humility and courtesy, trust and support (1 Cor. 13:4-7). This love means that one is eager to understand what the needs and interests of the other are and will do everything in his power to supply those needs and further those interests.”<sup>1</sup>

That’s quite a definition! It’s instructive that Paul follows the previous verses about submission with this kind of statement. There’s an understandable hesitancy when talking about submission because how it can be and is abused. In my experience, I know many more women who would love to follow their husband’s loving leadership – *if* he was leading or loving. Now that doesn’t excuse sinful behavior on a wife’s part. But I find that some men are far more concerned about the three verses addressed to wives and miss the eight verses addressed to husbands. Some men are far more concerned about their wife’s

---

<sup>1</sup> Francis Foulkes, [\*Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 162–163.

submissiveness than they are about their loving leadership. Would you like your wife to follow your lead? Let me suggest that you might want to start by humbly asking her how you might lead better.

It's important for you to know the counter-cultural use of this word. Commentators highlight that the posture identified by Paul was very unusual in his day.

“The idea that the husband should expend his life in the care of his wife, however, is unusual. The far more typical approach to marriage was that the wife should manage the household well in order to free the husband from domestic concerns and enhance his social prestige. In contrast, Paul’s comparison between the husband’s love for his wife and Christ’s love for the church implies that the husband’s love for his wife should be so broad and long and high and deep (3:18–19) that it includes the sacrifice of his own social prestige and well-being, indeed his life, for the sake of his wife (cf. Phil. 2:5-8).”<sup>2</sup>

So, as we dive into the specifics of this section, I'd like you to consider the application of the word “love” in a counter-cultural way. Part of the power of the church’s witness was how unusual it was. People from different socio-economic groups and different ethnicities were worshipping together. And I wonder about the church’s witness in the world when it comes to the way husbands love their wives.

It seems that in order for us to really live out this text the posture of a Christian husband toward his wife should be shocking the world. A Christian husband should be constantly considering how to honor, elevate, affirm, cherish, and empower his wife to be everything God created her to be. It takes no courage to be abrasive, harsh, demanding, or abusive. Any godless husband can do that. That’s not special. It says nothing about the gospel. In fact, I wonder how many church kids have walked away from Christianity because they never saw it really work in the context of their home.

The kind of love that Paul is talking about here isn’t fully learned through a class or reading a book. It’s something that is experienced, caught, and observed. If you, like me, were raised in a home with parents who loved Jesus and with a father who modeled love – be grateful, really grateful. And keep making intentional progress. If you grew up in a non-Christian home or with dad who didn’t model this, make it your aim to make the change in your generation. And if you are not married, don’t settle for some guy who treats you terrible, only hoping that marriage will make him better. It rarely does.

Husbands are to love their wives. It’s a high and holy calling.

Paul wants to make this very clear. He knows that we might not fully understand what he means by the word “love.” He doesn’t want to leave it open to secular definitions or examples. Therefore, he provides two comparisons connected “as” statements:

- “as Christ loved the church” (v. 25)

---

<sup>2</sup> Frank Thielman, [Ephesians](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 382.

- “as their own bodies” (v. 28)

These phrases help drive the point further and deeper.

### **Christlike Love**

The first comparison is central to Christianity. Paul roots the command to husbands in Christ’s love for the church. Could there be a more powerful or spiritually oriented reference? This is no minor statement. Everything we believe is in play here.

Mark it down in your mind: an abusive husband doesn’t understand the gospel. It’s not just a behavior problem; it’s a belief problem. Positively, a husband who properly lives this out makes the gospel clear and evident.

Paul not only connects a husband’s love to Christ’s love for the church, but he also provides four additional verbs to demonstrate what this looks like. Do you get the sense that Paul really wants for us to “get this”? The four verbs are:

- “gave himself up for her”
- “to sanctify her”
- “having cleansed her”
- “that he might present her”

These verbs help to add some additional weight to the command “love your wives as Christ loved the church.” Consider this like looking at the same issue from four different angles in order to really push the point home. Let’s briefly consider each of them.

**Gave himself up for her** - The primary focus of this statement is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Paul is drawing here from what we learned about in the first two chapters of Ephesians. Remember those stunning doctrinal sections?

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility (Eph. 2:13-16).*

If your heart cries “hallelujah” with Ephesians 2, then it requires you to be willing to lay down your life in sacrificial love. But “laying down your life” sounds too far away. How about if we start with laying down your expectations, your desires, your priorities, your career, or your need to be right? Self-sacrifice (your rights, dreams, demands) is how the gospel works. And it’s how marriage works.

Now this doesn’t mean that you are a passive man. It means that your life is tethered to the cross and to the love you have for your wife. It means you’ve set aside living just for you!

The church's head is the church's bridegroom. He does not crush the church. Rather he sacrificed himself to serve her, in order that she might become everything he longs for her to be, namely herself in the fullness of her glory. Just so a husband should never use his headship to crush or stifle his wife or frustrate her from being herself. His love for her will lead him to an exactly opposite path. He will give himself for her, in order that she may develop her full potential under God and so become more completely herself.<sup>3</sup>

**To sanctify her.** The idea here is to make a person holy and righteous – a saint. This is a concept that Paul has used throughout the book of Ephesians – for God's people to embrace the divine plan for their lives. It seems to be the idea of making someone even better.

**To cleanse her with the word.** There are different interpretations here. Is it ritual cleansing with Old Testament sacrifice in the background? Is it baptism? It appears to mean a supernatural purification – the way the gospel changes people.

**To present her.** We can't miss the words – “without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” There's a goal in mind here, and you probably hear the wedding illustration in this. Paul is pointing to a day in the future – a day of spiritual completion.

This is not just love. This is the kind of God-created affection that is deeply rooted in the gospel. It's the kind of love that flows from the gospel and proclaims the gospel. This is uniquely Christian and says something powerful about the gospel.

I love how Tim Keller says it:

Within this Christian vision of marriage, here's what it means to ... love. It is to look at another person and get a glimpse of what God is creating, and to say, "I see who God is making you, and it excites me! I want to be part of that. I want to partner with you and God in the journey you are taking to his throne. And when we get there, I will look at your magnificence and say, "I always knew you could be like this. I got glimpses of it on earth, but now look at you!"

### **Unified Love**

Paul isn't done. He picks up the theme of love again. But this time he says this: “Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (v. 28). At first it might seem that Paul is saying that since men are innately selfish, that they should love their wives with the same passion that they love themselves.

---

<sup>3</sup> John R. W. Stott, [\*God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians\*](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 229.

Of course, men can be and are selfish. So, this could be one way to take the text, especially considering the statement in verse 29 regarding nourishing and cherishing the body. But I don't think that's what Paul is doing here. He's not using self-concern to promote love for one's spouse.

I think there are two phrases that are central to his argument:

- "he who loves his wife loves himself"
- "we are members of his body"

He's talking about the spiritual oneness and unity that is central to marriage. He's elevating the value of the wife as more than a partner, but as a union that creates a loving, spiritual unity. A husband and wife live in a powerful union. And this union creates something that would not be possible without her.

Paul is pointing back to the beginning of the Bible – to the book of Genesis. From the very beginning, God intended for a man and woman to enter into a "one flesh union." Now we'll explore that more next week, but verse 31 makes it clear.

The husband loves his wife as himself because they are one.

Christian identity creates husbands who love with Christlike unity. So, if you are a husband – take heed! This is an important command. It's our primary aim. If you are a wife, this is the goal for which you should pray for your husband and cheer him on. If you are single, this is the standard by which you should evaluate your readiness for marriage.

Since the family is the bedrock of the created order and society, how we think about the role of husbands has profound effects. The Marines are not the only ones looking for a few good men.

The book of Ephesians invites us to look for a few good husbands – those who love their wives as Christ loved the church.

© College Park Church

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. [www.yourchurch.com](http://www.yourchurch.com)