

Husbands - Love Your Wives

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"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Eph. 5:31). Paul goes on to say that this is a great mystery. The marriage union is a mystery, but the union of Christ and the church an even greater mystery. It is experiencing the greater mystery that gives the foundation and power to be able to live in the lesser mystery.

To think that we could love our wives as Christ loved the church without knowing the love of God filling our hearts would be a great deception. We must come back to the foundation. We do not need a few basic principles, or "ten easy (or hard) steps to a successful marriage." We need the basis of the life of God, and no other life will suffice. The reason so many are failing today is that they are trying to work out relationships with their wives without a relationship with God. It is bound to fail, as the whole world is living proof. God is the one who designed marriage, and He designed it based on what He could do in men's and women's hearts.

What is the mystery of Christ and the church? It is that we may be one with God through the provision that Christ has made at Calvary. Christ did not come to give us principles to live by. He did not give us a book to follow. He came that we may have life--His life. He came that we may be joined to God--to be one spirit with Him. He laid down His life that we may live through Him. This is a great mystery, and it is the realization of that mystery which gives us the power to be able to live in the second mystery. Most of the time--if not every time--the problems we encounter have their roots here. If we want real solutions and not just "Band-Aids" to cover things up, we need to go back to God and make our relationship right with Him. He promised that He would send the Holy Spirit into any heart that would receive Him, and when He comes, He brings the Father and Son to dwell within. Out of this union will come the fruit of the Spirit, which is what we need in our relationships with our wives.

Are you knowing this union, this oneness with God? If not, you *can* know it. When we do know the union and communion with God by the Spirit that enables us to abide in Christ, we will know the wisdom and power to be the husbands that our wives need and desire.

How are we *one* with our wives? Paul tells us that when a man and his wife are joined together in marriage, God looks upon the two now as one. They are to live as though they were one body. A body has one life and one head. The members of a body do not move in separate directions, but cooperate with each other under the direction of the head to accomplish one purpose. Other than our union with God, this is the closest relationship known to mankind. It is not a mystical union, but a *real* union worked out in faith under the direction of God.

A wife does not cease to be an individual. She still has a will of her own. But in her relationship with God, she submits her will to the will of her husband who is the head of their relationship. If her husband is moving in faith before the Lord, he does not consider his wife separate from himself. He sees her as his own body, and treats her accordingly. *"No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church"* (Eph. 5:29).

Husbands, an essential key to being able to work out this marriage relationship to the glory of God is to see our wives as *one with us*. So often we view them separate from ourselves. We point our fingers at their failures. We put demands on them that they are not able to bear. We expect them to make up for every lack that is in us. We are much harder on them than we are on ourselves. Why? Because we do

not see them as one with us. We see them almost as our servants or slaves, to serve us and raise our children. Instead of enfolding them in our arms and drawing them near, we stand separate with our arms folded, watching to make sure they perform every task we have given them.

But Christ is our example, and He does not do that with us. He did not remain in Heaven and shout commands at us. He did not consider Himself, but rather laid aside His own glory and humbled Himself--becoming completely identified with mankind. He became a helpless babe in a manger. He died between two thieves. He promised that if we would open the door of our hearts to Him, He would send the Comforter to abide with us forever. In so doing, He said that the Holy Spirit would take the things of Jesus and make them ours. So close would be the relationship that we could consider that the Father and the Son had also come to abide within us, to do in us what we could not do.

Jesus does not stand separate from us, but becomes in us everything that we need. This union, which has no equal on earth, not even in marriage, is the key to our salvation. And seeing the union God has designed for marriage is the key in our relationships with our wives. It takes vision from God to be able to see, but He gives spiritual eye salve to those who are willing to humble themselves and ask. Once we see, then we must begin to move in what He has shown us. God only shows us enough to take a step. To see more, we must walk in what we do see.

Love As Christ Loved

"Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church." How does Christ love the church? We have already seen that He did not consider Himself, but laid down His own life that we might live through Him. Does that have meaning to us? What does it mean to lay down our lives? Again, it takes the Holy Spirit's eye salve to reveal the true meaning to our hearts. It means giving up our own ambitions and what we want to be. It means that everything that I have is not my own to do with as I please. My time, my resources, and even my body is not my own. I have been bought with a price. This is not just a one-time transaction but a daily walk. I must begin with an initial dealing with God, but then I must walk out that dealing in my daily walk. Christ has called me to be a living sacrifice.

When we finally come to this point and quiet our hearts before God, we will begin to see as God sees. In that light there is a step to take. It will be a step of service. At the last supper with His disciples, Christ took on Himself the garments of a servant and washed the disciples' feet. *"For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them"* (John 13:15-17). The disciples did not understand, but I trust that today we understand. Christ gave His disciples a living example of the life He was calling each one of them to live. It was the reality of what He said earlier--that "a man must hate his own life" if he wants to be His disciple.

When we begin to see the demands, we may react like Peter who said, "Lord, increase our faith." This is why I have said that the foundation must be our relationship with God. God loves us because of *who He is*, not because of what He ought to do or what He will receive in return. We also must love out of who we are in Christ. We can all know what to do, but we will not do it, nor do we have the power to do it with the right attitude, unless we have let God change our hearts so that we are living the life of God in union with Christ. Knowing what to do is not enough. Most men know what to do but never do it. We must know the reality of *"God working within us, both to will and to do His good pleasure"* (Phil. 2:13).

When we speak of serving our wives, do we think only of doing things for our wives? This may be included, but this is not the main emphasis. Many men do things for their wives without ever loving them as Christ loved the church. "God so loved that He gave." What did He give--things? No, He gave *Himself*. That is a far different thing. To give yourself to another is entirely different from just giving them things or doing things for them. Yet it is this giving of *ourselves* that our wives are looking for. This is what will bring fulfillment as nothing else can.

If we hold back from giving ourselves, it keeps a barrier between us and our wives. Love is not fulfilled and complete. But when we give up that individual spirit, let down the walls of our hearts, and give ourselves without reservation, it will lead us into a new dimension in our relationship with our wives. This is what love is all about--giving of ourselves. We must let God redefine love for us, and He did that at Calvary. He is our example. We need more than an example, but the Lord can speak to us by His obedience to the Father. Once we see the goal, the Lord is there within us to give us power to fulfill the vision He has given.

What satisfies us in our relationship with God? Is it not when we sense that we have been taken into the arms of Jesus and are accepted before God in the Beloved? Do we need anything else? The outward circumstances of our lives may be everything but secure and desirable, but if we are secure in His love, our hearts are at rest and we are fulfilled. Is the marriage relationship any different? If a wife is secure in her husband's love, will she not be at rest and satisfied? And in that place, will not her greatest desire be to please her husband and do his will? So often a husband will try to force his will on his wife because "he is the head," and yet he has not fulfilled the first requirement, which is to love her as Christ loves the church.

We will consider the question of headship, but let us be clear that any attempt by a husband to give direction or put demands on his wife, without the foundation of love *as God defines love*, will end in disaster sooner or later.

The Husband As Head

"For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body" (Eph. 5:23). "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (I Cor. 11:3). When we consider headship, we think of authority. Authority comes from the head to direct the body. But if we have not allowed God to deal with our concept of authority, and to change our thinking from the natural to the spiritual, we will move in a way that is completely contrary to what God wants, and the results will not glorify God.

How does God exercise authority in our lives? Does He force us, or demand our obedience? That was His working under the Old Testament law. It had its purpose and place in that time. But Christ fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law, then nailed it to the cross, destroying the enmity that kept man from God. In so doing, He brought in a higher law, the law of life in Christ Jesus. It was not that God had lowered His standards and overlooked that which He required in the past, but rather that He has now made the way by which we can partake of the life of God, and every aspect of His nature can now be expressed in us.

The authority of God is now exercised by an inward life of relationship and faith, not by a set of commandments from the outside. The law required no relationship--but life is not possible apart from relationship. Law and life are as different as day is from night.

Who loved first, man or God? We know the answer well. It was the goodness of God that led each one of us to repentance, and it is the love which had its full expression at Calvary that caused us to fall on our face before Him. "If you love me, keep my commandments," Jesus said, and any commandment that is kept apart from love has no meaning to God and no value to us. Thus God exercises authority in our lives by gaining our willing submission in response to His love. He gives us a heart to want to do His will. He does not force us at any point. Sometimes it takes a long time to get us to that place, but God is patient and long-suffering, and the end is worth the waiting.

Does Christ exercise authority in our lives? Of course He does. Apart from our coming under the authority of Christ, there is no salvation, no changing "from glory to glory," and no expression of His nature in a many-membered body. But remember how He gained that place of authority in our lives--by love alone.

If this is how Christ obtains a place of authority in our lives, is there any reason to think that the way is any different with our wives? So many times, we as husbands catch just a glimpse of the order of God, and then we "beat our wives over the head" with it, reminding them that we are the heads and it is their place to submit and obey. But the burden is on the husband to exercise his place of headship *in the same way that Christ does with man*.

First of all, we husbands need to gain the respect of our wives by the example that we live out before them. We need to demonstrate that we are under the authority of Christ by the expression of our lives, not by the words of our mouth. When our wives see the fruit of the Spirit coming from our relationship with God, they will not have to struggle with the problem of "Do as I say but not as I do." Yes, wives should submit as Sarah did even when her husband was wrong. But right now, I'm addressing husbands. Have you given your wife a life that compels her submission and obedience by its godly example? Have you demonstrated that you have a relationship with God?

God is Christ's head. Jesus demonstrated this truth as He lived in total dependence on the Father. He showed through the life that He lived that anyone who had seen Him had seen the Father. Can this be said of our lives? If not, then this is what we need to concentrate on. As you live the life of Christ before your wife, the Holy Spirit can bless the testimony to her heart and make it easy for her to find a place of submission under her head.

One thing we can say about Jesus--He always is ahead of the situation, never playing catch-up. What I mean is that He always gives us the direction that we need on time, quietly and clearly, so that we have a place to move. I am afraid that many of us husbands are lacking on this point. We are not waiting before God, watchful of the situations in our households, and moving with wisdom, on time. More often than not, we wait until things fall apart before we even notice, and then it is often our wives who bring it to our attention.

Instead of blaming ourselves for not being alert and fulfilling our responsibility to give direction ahead of time, we blame our wives for not taking care of the situation themselves. We are the ones to blame for not giving direction, and for this the whole household suffers. We would be amazed to see how responsive our wives would be to quiet, God-inspired direction that is given on time to meet the need. The kind of direction they resist is the off-the-cuff emotional responses that do not minister grace or meet the real need. Then we blame them for not having a submissive spirit. No wonder they have problems, for we are the ones who bring the problems when we actually should be the supply of God's grace to them.

Headship involves having eyes to see and ears to hear, and a spiritual mind to think as God directs. All of these only come through a relationship with God. Headship also means giving direction and ordering our households, instead of waiting for somebody else to do it. It is not even waiting for God to do it, because He has chosen to order the household through the husband. Headship means responsibility. We as husbands are responsible for *everything* that goes on in our homes. It is not that we are responsible for part of it and our wives are responsible for part. We are responsible for everything, and if there is blame to be taken, we are the ones to blame. God has made us able to take the blame and to do something about it.

Giving direction does not mean that we just issue a bunch of orders and then walk away. It means dealing with the real situations of life and taking specific steps to see our households ordered. It is so easy for us to leave the home and go to work with the excuse that "we have to earn the paycheck, but it is up to our wives to deal with the children." That is nothing but irresponsibility, and if we do this in any degree, we need to repent and accept our place as heads of our homes. We are the ones who are responsible, and this responsibility cannot be delegated.

Nourish and Cherish

"For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church" (Eph. 5:29). What does it mean to nourish and cherish? To nourish is to feed, and to cherish is to hold in high esteem or value. How do we feed our wives? To feed, we must have something to feed with. That means that we also must be feeding from Christ. He is nourishing those who are hungry. Christ feeds us by opening up a place to move and walk in God.

God is infinite, and it will take eternity to comprehend all that He is. But eternity does not begin at the grave--it begins now. The Holy Spirit is taking the things of Jesus and making them ours, and Jesus is revealing the Father to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. When we then walk in what Christ is showing us, the food is made nourishment to us, and we grow and are strengthened in our relationship with God. Jesus knows just what we need, and only feeds us what we can take--just as a wise mother recognizes what her children need, and day by day, little by little, she feeds them food that will bring strength to their bodies.

We are to nourish our wives. How do we know what they need? We must have vision from God. How do we feed them? We must have wisdom from God. Are we concerned with their spiritual strength? Jesus is concerned with ours. Do we take responsibility for the spiritual health of our wives, or do we leave that to the preacher? As the head of your wife, you are responsible for her spiritual nourishment and growth. If she is weak, it is your fault. You have not fed her in such a way that she can digest it and be strengthened.

If we really saw our wives as "one flesh" with us, we would give much more diligent attention to their nourishment. Their weakness is our weakness, and their strength is our strength. Do we care about our growth together? We cannot be strong if they are not strong. Our place is to feed our wives the riches of God so that they can move in faith with us, in response to God. It is a great responsibility, but God gives the grace.

What does it mean to cherish? To cherish is to hold our wives as extremely valuable in our eyes. The proverb writer asked the question, *"Who can find a virtuous woman? For her worth is far above rubies"* (Prov. 31:10). Sometimes the way we treat our wives indicates we do not really value them at all. We don't spend time with them, we are not concerned with their burdens, and we talk to them as though they had no feelings. God's love working in our hearts will cause us to hold our wives in the

same place God does, and He is no respecter of persons. He loves every person equally as much, and covets a personal relationship with each one.

A woman who is valued in her husband's eyes feels very honored, and rather than inspiring pride, it will encourage her to a place of humility, feeling that she is not worthy of such honor. Her response will be one of submission, desiring to please the one who loves her. The more worth she feels she has in the eyes of her husband, the more diligent will be her labor to do his will. He who nourishes his own wife nourishes himself, for she is one flesh with him.

Husbands, my heart's cry and challenge to each one of us is to ask God for a fresh vision of our responsibility. Yes, it is a great responsibility, but unless we can be faithful to God here, how can we move on? If a man does not know how to take care of his own household, how can he take care of the church of the living God? Our first responsibility, beyond our own relationship with God, is our wives. And if we cannot fulfill that, we can go no farther.

May the Lord encourage and strengthen each one of us today. Let us stay before God until a fresh revelation breaks upon our hearts. When it does, let us walk in that revelation until every part of it finds expression in our relationship with our wives. All will benefit and God will be glorified. Glory to His name!