Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

God's Pattern for Husbands, Part 1
Scripture: Ephesians 5:25
Code: 1946

On February 14 of this year, the Daily News, our local newspaper, reported an AP story about Rex and Theresa Lagale(?) of Albuquerque, New Mexico. They were married recently. And they had claimed to have built their marriage on a solid foundation, a foundation that guaranteed to them success in marriage. What was that foundation? A sixteen-page pre-nuptial agreement. And in that sixteen-page agreement they had spelled out in clear detail an understanding of everything that can go wrong in a marriage. The rules were all laid out. How often they will make love and which gasoline they will buy. Who does the laundry and who does the yard. Some of the rules...nothing is to be left on the floor overnight. Another one...never allow the fuel gauge in the car to go lower than a half a tank. And on and on it goes. A solid foundation for a marriage. Surely that will guarantee a great marriage.

Typically people believe that a great marriage is really guaranteed by being in love. If people are just in love, no rules are necessary, if they just love each other, if there's just the bliss of romance. But it's so very hard to define that bliss.

Recently there was a survey done among children about love, children looking at the adult world, were asked a series of questions. Let me share some of the answers.

They were asked...how do people in love typically behave? Wendy, age 8, said, "Well, when a person gets kissed for the first time, they fall down and they don't get up for at least an hour."

They were asked another question. Why does love happen between certain people? Andrew, age 6, said, "Well one of the people has freckles, so he finds somebody else who has freckles, too." And May, age 9, said, "No one is really sure why it happens, but I heard it has something to do with how you smell and that's why perfume and deodorant are so popular." And then there was Manuel, age 8, he said, "I think you're supposed to get shot with an arrow or something, but the rest of it isn't to be so painful."

And then they were asked...what do you think falling in love is like? John, age 9, said, "It's like an avalanche and you ought to run for your life." And Glenn, age 7, said, "If falling in love is anything like learning how to spell, I don't want to do it, it takes too long."

On the role of looks in love, the children were asked...how important is your looks when it comes to falling in love? Anita, age 8, said, "If you want to be loved by somebody who isn't already in your family, it doesn't hurt to be beautiful." Brian, age 7, said, "It isn't always just how you look, look at me, I'm handsome like anything and I haven't gotten anybody to marry me yet." Christine said, "While beauty is skin deep, but how rich you are can last a long time."

And then the children were asked...why do lovers hold hands? Gavin, age 8, said, "They want to make sure their rings don't fall off because they paid good money for them." And John, age 9, said, "They're just practicing for when they might have to walk down the aisle some day and do that holy matchamony thing."

And then there were some confidential, sort of general opinions about love that I thought interesting. David, age 8, said, "Love will find you, even if you're trying to hide from it. I've been trying to hide from it since I was five, but the girls keep finding me." And Regina, age 10, said, "I'm not rushing into being in love, I'm finding fourth grade hard enough."

And then they were asked to make suggestions about sure-fire ways to really fall in love. Dell, age 6, said, "Tell her you own a whole bunch of candy stores." And Camille said, "Shake your hips and hope for the best." Bart, age 9, said, "One way to do it, to make a person fall in love, is to take her out to eat and make sure it's something she likes to eat. French fries always works for me."

And then they were asked...how can you tell if two adults eating a restaurant are really in love? Bobby, age 9, said, "See if the man picks up the check." And Bart, age 9, said, "Lovers will just be staring at each other and their food will get cold. Other people will eat." And so it goes.

How to make love endure...they were asked. Dick, age 7, said, "Spend most of your time loving instead of going to work." Aaron, age 8, said, "Don't forget your wife's name, that will mess up the love." And Dave, age 8, said, "Be a good kisser, it might make your wife forget you never take out the trash."

Well, pretty hilarious stuff when you ask children to talk about love and to find some meaningful definition. But in all honesty, I'm not quite sure adults would do any better, are you? Figuring out how to make romance endure permanently is a great challenge.

In spite of the difficulty in doing that, in spite of the difficulty of making a marriage work and trying maybe to figure it out in a sixteen-page pre-nuptial agreement, or whatever else, in spite of all of the divorces, in spite of all the difficulties, we need to be reminded that 96 percent of all men and 94 percent of all women will say "I do." And then most of them, sooner or later in our culture, will say, "I don't," and get divorced. But the fact of the matter is, well over 90 percent of the people still pursue marriage. The sad reality is they can't make it work and the collapse of marriage and family

relationships is certainly predictable in our culture.

We shouldn't really be too surprised about that. I'd like you to turn in your Bible to 2 Timothy for just a moment, and we can see there, at least in part, what makes marriage so difficult. In 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 1 it says, "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come," now the last days began when the Messiah arrived, so we are in the last of the last days. And here is how it describes people in these last days. "Men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant." Now you could stop right there and understand that people who are self-lovers, money lovers, boastful and arrogant are going to have a hard time with any sustained relationship, aren't they?

Not only that, "They are revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable," and by the way, the word "unloving" is *astorgoi*in the Greek, it means they lack normal family love. One of the features of last-days disintegration is the death of family love. "They are malicious gossips without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." They are unloving, *astorgoi*, they lack normal family love they are so involved in their own self-love and self- fulfillment.

And we ask the question, and it's rightly to be asked, "Is there any hope for marriage when marriage is assaulted by this kind of last-days mentality, when it is assaulted on the outside by the godless immoral culture in which we live, when it is assaulted on the inside by the battle of the sexes, a woman trying to gain the ascendancy and dominate a man, and a man trying to suppress and control a woman?" Can marriage be rescued in the midst of all of this? Here we are fighting it on the inside, fighting it on the outside, fighting it in terms of the very time in which we live, when prophecy is coming to pass, is there any hope?

Well, the answer comes to us over in Ephesians 5, so you can turn to that text. That's home base for us as we go through this study of God's plan for marriage and the family. And we are reminding ourselves here in Ephesians chapter 5 that in order for marriage to be what God wants it to be, there are some prerequisites. He starts discussing marriage in verse 22 with the wives, and then down in verse 25 with the husband, and then down in chapter 6 verse 1, the children, and then in verse 2, a little more about the children how they honor their father and mother in verse 3 as well. And then in verse 4 he talks about fathers, no doubt encompassing parents as well. So as he gets into the whole idea of marriage and the family in verse 22 and flows all the way down into chapter 6, we begin to see the details. But before the details come the preliminaries in verses 18 to 21.

And we are reminded that verse 18 says, "We are to be filled with the Spirit," Spirit-filled, to be controlled by the Holy Spirit is the only hope for marriage to be what God wants it to be. God can turn the curse into a blessing, as He said in Nehemiah 13:2, and He does that by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers. Only believers, really, have the possibility of having this kind of fulfilled relationship in marriage and the family because only believers possess the Holy Spirit and

can therefore be filled with the Spirit, dominated by the Spirit, controlled by the Spirit.

Secondly in verse 19, there is to be singing, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord. This indicates a happy heart, a joyful heart, a rejoicing spirit. Where you have a Spirit-filled person, where you have a heart full of joy, you have hope for a good relationship.

Then verse 20, saying thanks. "Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God even the Father." No matter what happens, no matter what goes wrong, no matter how you might be misunderstood, treated in a marriage, your heart is filled with nothing but thanks, even for your trials because you know they come from God and have a perfecting work.

To be Spirit-filled, to be singing from the depths of your heart with joy, to be saying thanks for everything, and then in verse 21, "To be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. To have an attitude of mutual submission in which you consider others better than yourselves." Those are the spiritual prerequisites for a successful marriage...Spirit-filled, singing, saying thanks and submitting. And we looked at those in some detail a few weeks ago.

Now after those general spiritual realities are discussed, verse 22, Paul launches right in to the role of wives. "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." And we discussed how God has designed this marvelous role of submission to the woman in marriage. And by His design marriage can be fulfilled when that role is assumed with joy.

Now coming to verse 25 we embark upon the husbands. "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 to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself." We'll stop there for the moment.

A clear principle then is given in verse 25, the husbands responsibility is to love his wife. It doesn't say rule her, he already has that tendency, even a tendency to dominate her, to control her, to command her. The curse does that. He is told here he is to love her. She is submitting to him, he is to express love to her. It is the leadership of care. Yes he is the head of the woman as God is the head of Christ and Christ is the head of the man, as 1 Corinthians 11 says. He is over her, she is to call him lord, as we learned in 1 Peter chapter 3. He is the stronger vessel, as Peter says. It is his responsibility to give direction and provision and leadership. But it is in a context of love...always in a context of love.

Colossians chapter 3 and verse 19 says, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them." There is always the danger of the loss of love and the husband becomes a petty tyrant. When love is not the context of that relationship, a petty tyranny begins to take shape. And so it is the headship of love, it is the leadership of love, it is the guiding of affection.

Now I want us to look more closely at what God means in this command because it's laid out so magnificently. Let's talk about the manner of this love. Back to verse 25. "Husbands, love your wives." How? "Just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." That's pretty clear. It is the love of self-sacrifice. It is not the love of domination. You are to love your wives just as Christ also loves the church and gave Himself up for her. That is the manner of love, the same kind of love that Christ extended to His church. In Acts 20 it says He purchased the church with His own blood. In Romans 5:8 it pictures Him pouring out His love in His death for unworthy sinners. In Romans 8 it is an unchanging, undying love. He loves us with a love from which we can never be separated.

John Chrysostom, the great preacher, said, "Hear the measure of love, if it be needful that thou shouldest give thy life for her or be cut to pieces a thousand times, or endure anything whatever, refuse it not. Christ brought His church to His feet by His great care, not by threats or any such thing. So do thou conduct thyself toward thy wife," end quote.

I have often heard people and I suppose they have good intentions when they say it, say about their wife, "I love her too much," to which you can promptly reply, "Do you love her as much as Christ loved the church, if you don't, then you don't love her enough." That's the standard.

This elevation and commitment to a wife was frankly revolutionary in the Roman world, as it is revolutionary in our world today. Kato, a Roman writer, said, "If you are to catch your wife in an act of infidelity, kill her without a trial. But if she catches you, she would not venture to touch you with her finger, she has no right." Serious double standard.

A man had complete control over the female population, both his wife and his daughters, and could take their life at any moment without any legal recourse. When Paul says to husbands, "Love your wives and sacrifice your lives for them as Christ gave Himself up for His church," this is frankly revolutionary stuff. It's revolutionary today where you have an agenda in which a man basically says, "As long as you fulfill what I want out of life you can be my wife. And when you cease to do that, I'll get somebody else," right? That's how it works today. What God said through Paul was shocking then and it is shocking now.

Women were considered in that culture differently than they are today. They were considered less than human. They were considered as slaves, beasts of burden, in many cases. They had no rights at all. And men fulfilled the curse in fully exercising a vicious kind of rule and domination over women

in general. And Paul says you have to exchange that in Christ for a love that is the kind of love with which Christ also loved the church and it caused Him to give Himself up for the church. it is a self-sacrificing love. It is humble, unselfish love.

Peter further defines this love without ever using the word. Look at 1 Peter chapter 3. Men, it's important for us to understand this and we want to cover all of the related texts. In 1 Peter chapter 3 and verse 7, we can all rejoice in verse 6 where Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord, and women are to do the same. But how about verse 7, "You, husbands, likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way as with a weaker vessel since she is a woman and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life so that your prayers may not be hindered." What a great statement.

Now there are a number of things here, just to remind you, let me give you three "C"s, men, that you need to remember. One, consideration. Live with your wives in an understanding way. This is opposite the cave men mentality, the macho mentality, the independent mentality, the self-serving mentality. This is understanding, sensitivity, meeting her needs, understanding her feelings, fears, anxieties, concerns, goals, dreams, desires. That's what he means. Live with your wives in an understanding way, sometimes it boils down to listening, doesn't it? Understand her heart because you cannot express your love to her unless it is sacrificing love that meets needs, you have to know what those needs are. Not only consideration, but here's an old word, chivalry. He says in verse 7, live with her not only in an understanding way but as with a weaker vessel since she is a woman. What does that mean? It simply means you are unequal physically. She is weaker. You don't say to her, "After you've changed the tire I'll be glad to take you to the store." You understand that there is a physical weakness in woman. God has so designed her to be under the strength and protection of a man. She needs our strength.

Consideration, live with her according to understanding, chivalry, treat her as a weaker vessel, be her strength on the physical side and then thirdly, communion...communion. Treat her with honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life. Men and women are unequal physically. They are equal spiritually, treat her as a spiritual equal.

I love what it says in Song of Solomon where the man says, "This is my beloved," and the woman says, "This is my beloved, my friend." A deep sense of intimate equal sharing of spiritual things. Peter gives us some straight forward things, gentlemen, if we are to be the husbands God wants us to be. We must understand our wives, understanding their needs, understanding their feelings, understanding what it is that they long for and desire. We must live with them providing our strength, strength physically, strength emotionally, strength of character, all of those things could be added. And we must treat them with communion as equals spiritually. We are to love our wives, that is a command.

You cannot say, "Well I don't love her anymore," without confessing that you've sinned, that you've sinned. You say, "Well wait a minute, you don't know how she's treated me." That's not the issue. Christ loved sinners when they hated Him. Is that not true? And that's the model, that's the standard. It doesn't mean that there's no emotion there. If you truly love, the emotion is rich, the feelings are thrilling, the friendship is wonderful.

The biblical definition really plunges to some immeasurable depths. Let's go back to Ephesians. When we start to talk about how we are to love in this sacrificial way, it really starts to go down deep. In verse 25 it says, "Just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." Can I say it simply, gentlemen? The Spirit-filled husband loves his wife not for what she can do for him, but what he can do for her. That's how Christ's love worked and works. He loves us not because there's something in us that attracts Him, He loves us because He determined to love us in spite of our unattractiveness. He loves us with a love that seeks not to tyrannize us, a love that seeks rather to meet our needs, to understand us, to provide strength for us.

It's not a question of deserving. We didn't do anything to earn Christ's love. It wasn't because we were more desirable than other people that He set His affection on us. We don't deserve His love. There's nothing attractive in us. God doesn't look over the world and pick out the people who somehow draw out His affection. Not at all. God loves us, Christ loves us like...I suppose like Hosea loved Gomer. He saw her as a prostitute. He watched her carry out her professional prostitution. He watched her go through many lovers. He watched her stripped naked on a block being auctioned off, a prostitute for the highest bidder in the slave market, and he went into the place and bought her, not because there was anything about her that was clean and sweet and gracious and lovely, but because it was in his heart to love her. And so God loved prostituted Israel. And so Christ loves His church, even before they are His church and thus sets His affection upon them. And even after they are His church and they prostitute themselves to iniquities, He still loves them. It is a love that never dies. It is a love that can't be killed. It is a love that is utterly and completely self-sacrificing.

I suppose if there's any one way to characterize this love it would be to say it means to self. Swallow your pride, swallow your personal desires, swallow your personal ambitions, swallow your fantasies and dreams about how life might have been with someone else, or under some other circumstances, put all of that aside, it is all meaningless, it only boils down to temptation. And love your wives with a love that knows nothing of self and only of her and her needs and her concerns and her heart and sacrifice your life on her behalf.

This is the kind of love, of course, that the Spirit of God gives us the capacity to carry and to share, the love of Christ is shed abroad in our hearts. The very love which Christ Himself demonstrated toward us, we partake in that love. The fruit of the Spirit is love. The Spirit produces in us this incredible love. First Peter 1:22 says, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls, or been converted, you now have a sincere love, you have the capacity to fervently love one another

from the heart for you have been born again." This is the kind of love that belongs only to people who have been born again. The world tries to hang on to romantic love as long as it possibly can, and eventually the bells stop ringing and the whistles stop blowing and life gets pretty mundane and pretty routine and you start getting older and something outside your own marriage may look better than what's there at home. And you can't sustain that love and you can't hold on to that love because you don't have a new nature. But we who have been born again have a sincere love, a fervent love because of the imperishable seed of the living and abiding Word of God which has granted us new life.

God so loved us that He gave His Son. Christ so loved us that He gave His life. We love our wives to the point of self- sacrifice.

Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 13. In 1 Corinthians 13 every characteristic of love listed in that chapter is in a verb form. Love is not static, it is not a substantive in terms of language, it is a verb. Love acts, love does something.

Love, verse 4, is patient, love is kind, is not jealous, does not brag, is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly, it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth, it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, love never fails. All of those are verbs, that's how love acts. It is patient, it is kind, it is never jealous, it does not brag, it is not arrogant, it does not act unbecomingly, does not act in a way that cheapens. It never seeks its own, it is not provoked easily, it doesn't remember wrongs against it. It doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness, it rejoices only in the truth. It endures all things, it believes the best, it hopes the best, it endures everything and never fails. That's the character of love and that's how we are to love our wives.

It is always a verb, it is always acting on someone. We have been given the capacity to love like this by the Holy Spirit. Because we have been transformed and born again, the Spirit of God has come into us, we have received the fruit of the Spirit which is love and we can share that love. The one in whom the love of God is perfected, said John in 1 John 2, is the one who has been born of God.

If you are a Christian then, you cannot come along and say, "Well I'm sorry I really tried to love her but I don't have the capability." Yes you do. That supernatural spiritual love is there if you choose to exercise it.

You say, "What about if I'm mistreated and if I'm continually mistreated and if she's unfaithful and she leaves me and she goes out and finds another man," and on and on? In those kinds of circumstances the Bible has plenty to say and we'll discuss that as we go along. If it comes to a divorce and a separation and an abandonment, obviously you can no longer express that love if she chooses not to be there to receive it. But as long as she's there, it's your responsibility to give it.

And it is a love that is not dependent on the object. It's not dependent on the physical appearance. It's not depended on muscle tone. I hear so much about that today or someone's figure or someone's looks...it's not dependent on that. It is dependent on the attribute of the lover, the one who loves. And Paul says, as I read to you, "Love does not seek its own," it never wants revenge, it never wants retaliation. To put it simply, love forgives everything done against it. The loving person doesn't keep a record of wrongs.

And I'll tell you, you know what destroys marriages is unforgiveness...unforgiveness. If you continually forgive one another all the time, there's no record of wrong kept, there's no accumulating of a wall every time someone will not forgive, another brick goes into the wall that begins to wall of the two people. Nothing is more important in your marriage than forgiveness, instant spontaneous complete forgiveness so that it's never brought up again. And you cannot accumulate the devastating attitudes of bitterness and retaliation and revenge that destroy a relationship.

When a man is Spirit-filled, when he is so filled with joy and gratitude to God for all that Christ has done and when he loves his wife as himself, he will sacrifice himself for her and thus his authority will be soft and warm and affirming and secure and she will follow if she is obedient to God's plan for her. I suppose, men, we might even ask the question...when was the last time you made a sacrifice for your wife? I'm not talking about something trivial, something significant. Have you crucified self, set something aside to focus on her? I know many men are anxious to be leaders and spiritual giants and they want to appear as they're in control of everything and they are the pious leader of the family. But true spirituality really...really is death to self. So sometimes it's hard to recognize the real strong spiritual leader in a family because he's humble...he's humble, he's taking up his cross daily, he's denying self, he's dying daily, he's willing to be crucified with Christ, he's looking not on his own things but on the things of others, esteeming others better than himself. He's setting aside his desires for her. And it may well be that he appears weak when in fact he's strong.

I suppose death to self is the real issue. Somewhere along your pilgrimage as a Christian you need to learn to die to yourself regularly. It saves you from being defensive, revengeful, retaliatory, hostile, accumulating the list of things against you.

When you are forgotten or neglected or purposely set aside and you sting and hurt with the insult or the oversight, but your heart is happy and you count it a privilege to suffer for Christ, that is dying to self.

When you're good is evil spoken of, when she misunderstands you, when your desires are not interesting to her, when your advice is disregarded and your opinions are ridiculed and when you are abused, when you are mistreated, or misunderstood and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself, that is dying to self.

When you lovingly patiently bear any disruption, any irregularity, any annoyance, when you can stand face to face with folly and waste and extravagance and insensitivity and endure it as Jesus endured it, that is dying to self.

When you are content with any food, any clothes, any climate, any society, any interruption or any solitude, that is dying to self.

When you never care to refer to yourself in a conversation, or to record and recite your own good works, or to pursue commendation, when you can truly love, to be unrecognized for something good, that is dying to self.

When you see someone else prosper, someone else reach goals that you desire and you can honestly rejoice with that other person in spirit, feel no envy and not question God while your needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances, that is dying to self.

And, gentlemen, when you can receive correction and reproof from your wife and humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, feel no rebellion and feel no resentment rising within your heart, that is dying to self.

And that's what makes you the leader God wants you to be in your home. It's when self dies. The manner with which we are to love our wives is the manner with which Christ loved the church. First of all, that is a sacrificial love that demands death to self. It's not easy, especially if you're a strong person, confident person, capable person, successful person, smart person, wise person, respected person, leader type, to constantly deny yourself is a great spiritual challenge. But that's what God calls for. And when you lead in an environment of love and self-denial, you create the atmosphere that a woman longs for.

Secondly, this love is not only a sacrificial love, but it is a purifying love...it is a purifying love. And this is very important for us to understand. Ephesians chapter 5 verse 26, we are to love as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, verse 26, "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."

Now this is a beautiful picture here. Christ loves His church with a sacrificial love and with a sanctifying love or a purifying love. He loves His church enough to cleanse her. He loves His church enough to present her without spot or wrinkle or any such thing but holy and blameless.

What does it mean? It means He seeks the church's purity. He wants the church...can you see the word there in verse 27...in all her glory, *endoxon*, that is in all gorgeous splendor. Luke 7:25

translates it "gorgeously apparelled," as if she were a queen. Christlike beauty it's talking about, the beauty of purity, the splendor of holiness and virtue without spot, that means stain, without wrinkle, or flaw, *rhutis*in the Greek, flaw.

When Christ takes His church to be His bride, gives His life for His church, and then He seeks the purity of His church. Christ is the purifier of the church. And that is the way we are to be toward our wives. We are to do everything we can to lead them to holiness and to purity.

In John 13 Jesus said to Peter, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean, and you are clean but not all of you." The idea of that is simple and beautiful. In the Orient the man would take a bath thoroughly cleansing himself and he had then only to periodically through the day wash off his feet. We learn from that that, of course, as Christians when we came to Christ we took a bath, we were bathed, but as we walk through the world in this day of our life, we collect dust on our feet and we need a continual cleansing. And those of us who are in Christ are being purified all the time, cleaned all the time, cleansed all the time, forgiven all the time.

In John 15 and verse 3, "You are already clean because of the Word which I have spoken to you." There's already been a cleansing, there's already been a time when you've been cleaned through the Word, but He even goes on to say there's a pruning to keep you clean. Here in Ephesians chapter 5 it' the same thing. Verse 26, "That He might sanctify, or having cleansed her, by the washing of water with the Word."

Gentlemen, if you do anything in the life of your wife, expose her to the Word of God. Bring her under the hearing of the Word of God that she might be daily, routinely cleansed. That as John 15:2 puts it, the one right before the verse I read, "He takes every branch that bears fruit and purges it that it might bear more fruit." God wants to purify His own and a husband must desire to purify his wife. How does he do that? By constantly exposing her to the Word of God. You are the prophet in that home, you are the one to bring her under the hearing of the Word of God, to make her clean, to purify her. John 17:17 says, "Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy Word is truth." It's the Word that cleanses.

First of all, in your own heart and your own mind you want to be certain that you never lead your wife into any sin. You never expose her to any iniquity. Don't draw her in to those things which are going to tempt her. Don't take her to some form of entertainment that's going to expose her to sinful feelings. Don't irritate her, or exacerbate, or embitter her so that she falls to the temptation of anger. And you know where the buttons are, don't you? You can say to her, "Oh you're just like your...fill in the blank...mother," and you know what that does. Or you can drag up that same deal out of the past that always elicits the same hostility when you're ready to really wound. Don't do that. If you seek her purity, if you seek her holiness, if you seek her to be spotless and without stain and without flaw, to be cleansed and holy and blameless, then you would never lead her into anything that would produce iniquity. You would never expose her to anything that would produce strong temptation.

On the other hand, you would constantly bring the Word of God to her. You can do that in a number of ways. Make sure that you're here to hear the Word of God and she's by your side, make sure that you give her opportunity to be involved in a Bible study or whatever it might be, to spend time she needs reading the Word of God and being challenged by books or whatever, tapes, whatever source. Make sure that you encourage those things in her life.

So sad to have men come to me and say, "I don't know what went wrong but all of a sudden my wife is gone and she ran off with...whoever." And I often have to say, "Of course you understand that's not the beginning of something, that's the end of something. And what it is the end of is a long developed pattern of sin before you finally bolt like that."

What have you been doing to disciple your wife so that that doesn't happen? That's spiritual leadership as a joint heir, as one who is equal to you in Christ. What are you doing to strengthen her spiritually? Bring her under the sound preaching and teaching of God's Word, expose her to great truth out of Scripture, call her to purity, never do anything that could lead her to be tempted. Don't put her in a position to be tempted. That's another reason why I'm so concerned about men who send their wives to work in an ungodly world because they are exposed to very strong temptation. They're in that kind of office environment with all those well-dressed, slick, successful men, they're dressed for that environment as well, everything looks pretty good and they come home and it's a little bit different, you know. You're slopping around in your dirty jeans with your old T-shirt on and she's poking around in a ragged bathrobe, and it just isn't the same. Why expose her to the kind of temptation that she will experience in that environment?

You know what the Lord constantly does with His church? He says, "Come out from among them and be ye...what?...separate, don't touch the unclean thing." He's always trying to pull the church out of the world. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." I know the damage those things are going to do because friendship with the world is enmity with God, James says, and the Lord is always trying to pull us out and separate us and not allow our thinking to be influenced by the world.

In Romans 12, a very, very straightforward command is given to us with regard to worldliness, "Do not be conformed to this world, be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Get out of that system. Get out of that way of thinking. And, gentlemen, you have the responsibility for the protection of your wife's purity on every front and the negative side of that is to prevent temptation, the positive side of that is to expose her to the teaching and the instruction of the Word of God.

In Athens, for example, when a bride was taken, she was to be bathed in the waters of the Calera(?) River, the river was sacred to the people and it symbolized a cleansing from all previous defilement and an entrance into a pure marital life. And that's why traditionally there's a white gown worn by a

bride the first time she is married, that is to represent purity. Marriage is to be a purifying experience, it takes this woman and separates her from all others unto her husband...a purifying relationship. Her husband then takes on the responsibility or the maintenance of that purity.

The love of Christ for His church causes Him to desire to keep His church clean. And your love for your wife should have the same exact desire.

Let me tell you something. It's pretty challenging to live with a godly woman, pretty challenging. I know how challenging it is. It's pretty challenging to live with a woman who expects you to live everything you preach, pretty ridiculous, isn't it? It's very challenging to live with somebody who has immensely high expectations for your virtue. And you might say to yourself, "You know, I could have a lot more fun if my wife wasn't so picky." But in the end, your heart tells you, "What a privilege, what an honor, what a joy to have someone who has such high standards of spiritual accountability to hold you to, what benediction and blessing that brings on your own life. If a wife can bring that to a husband, surely in the husband's role he has a greater responsibility to bring it to her.

Second Corinthians 11:2, Paul says, "I'm jealous for you with a godly jealousy, I betrothed you to one husband that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin, but I am afraid lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." Paul says I want you pure and devoted to Christ and I fear that you're going to follow off after some other lovers.

True love is always concerned with the purity of its object. Christ with His church, Paul with his congregation, a man with his wife...disciple her, purify her, never expose her to impure influences. Her purity is your responsibility. In fact, it even says in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 verse 35, "If women desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home for it's improper for a woman to speak in church." Gentlemen, we are to be the theological teacher, we are to be the spiritual source, we are to be the spiritual repository of truth for a woman can come that in hearing the truth she may be purified.

If you really love your wife you're going to hate anything that defiles her. Anything that steals her purity will become to you a terrifying enemy. Any so-called love which drags a partner down to uncleanness is a false love...a false love.

I remember reading a few years ago a man in the ministry saying, "My wife and I read Playboy magazine together. After 18 years we need something to stimulate our relationship." You expose yourself to that, you expose yourself to gross temptation and sin, and then you expose your wife to that? You have forfeited your responsibility to protect her and to purify her.

Any so-called love that makes someone coarse, someone hard rather than refined and pure is really lust masquerading. Love always seeks the absolute purity of its object and it seeks it sacrificially. Real love is sacrificial and real love is a cleanser...a cleanser. It will use discipline if it needs to. Hebrews chapter 12 verses 5 to 10 tells us how the Lord disciplines whom He loves. And, husband, if you're filled with the Spirit, if your heart is right, your life is right, you're going to purify your wife, it may mean confrontation, it may mean a certain discipline, but it certainly means you protect her from temptation and you expose her to the purifying influence of God's truth.

Well, verse 27 and we'll close. Paul says, "We're to present our wives just as Christ presents 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." You want to present your wife in all her pure splendor. That's her beauty. It's not her hair and her wardrobe, it's her purity that is her beauty. No place for degrading her, no place for criticizing her, no place for knocking her, you want to lift her up for purity is her glory. Her holiness is her beauty. The loving husband, the loving husband is not ashamed of his wife, he never degrades his wife, he never criticizes his wife, he never speaks unkindly of his wife, he never paints her faults large. The loving husband, like Christ, seeks only to present his bride exalted, pure and glorious. Love seeks to honor.

So, that's how we love...sacrificially, cleansing or sanctifying her as well, purifying her, and the love that honors, that lifts her up and says, "Look what God has given me." That's the love that thrills the heart of a wife.

There's more to come but that will be for next time. Let's pray.

Father, we know that it's certainly within the realm of possibility that this kind of life can be lived. We thank You. We thank You that we can experience it in our own marriages. We also know that it is not easy, it is not simple, it takes real spiritual devotion and dedication and maturity. But it is to this end we pray, God, that You would raise up men who love their wives like Christ loved His church, who have denied themselves and in that self-denial have the capacity to sacrifice themselves for the woman You've given them, who not only love sacrificially but love purifyingly, who love with honor, seeking only to lift up and exalt, never to degrade and bring down. O Lord, what joy, what bliss, what blessing, what fulfillment can be found in such relationship. The curse notwithstanding, the confusion and chaos that the flesh generates inside that the world generates outside. And even these last days notwithstanding when normal natural family love is dying, in some cases dead and gone, and men are lovers only of themselves, still in the power of the regenerated life and the indwelling Spirit, marriage can be the grace of life. And two heirs of that grace can share its riches together because of what You've done in us through Your grace. Work this work in every life, Lord, that our marriages and our homes might bring to us unending joy and fulfillment and that another generation in seeing it might be raised to the same joys by the same path of obedience. We commit ourselves afresh to You as husbands and as wives to be obedient as You enable us, in Christ's name. Amen.

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