

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

God's Pattern for Husbands, Part 2

Scripture: Ephesians 5:25-33

Code: 1947

Tonight we return to our study of God's pattern for husbands, and we are talking about God's design for marriage and the family. And I just want to let you all know that we're not done. We're going to talk about parenting, we're going to talk about the responsibility of children, we're going to have some time even to discuss the subject of singleness and how that works into God's perfect order. We'll discuss the issue of divorce and remarriage. And before we're done, we're going to cover some very, very important themes. But for now, this is the second message in dealing with the Scripture related to husbands.

Turn in your Bible to Ephesians chapter 5 – Ephesians chapter 5 – and starting in verse 25, we have direct instruction to husbands, and we'll be looking at that particular text tonight. But to begin with, so much has been spoken and so much has been written about the tragic impact of the feminist movement. It has negatively impacted marriages, it has devastated families, it has destroyed individual women. It has created chaos on the social level, on the moral level. And it is right that we make sure people understand the tragic impact of feminism, and we have done that in this particular study some weeks back. It is clearly a sinful, satanic assault on God's design for the happiness and prosperity of mankind.

But while we're talking about what has gone wrong on the distaff side, while we're talking about what is wrong in the feminist agenda, what is wrong on the female side, we cannot ignore the failure of men – failure to follow and fulfill their responsibility as God has designed it. They, too, have perverted their maleness, perverted the role that God intended for them. There's no question about that. In fact, when things go wrong on an athletic team, the coach gets fired. He's the leader and success is his responsibility. When profits drop seriously in a corporation, the president and the CEO are replaced. When things don't go well in the church, the board seeks a new pastor. That's the nature of leadership. If things aren't going well, you take it right to the leader. The leader bears the responsibility, ultimately, for success and for failure – and we see that all throughout our society.

And certainly in the home the buck stops with the husband, with the father, and if all is not well, the greatest measure of responsibility for that may well be in the hands of the leader, the father. By God's design and by God's Will, clearly expressed in Scripture, the man is the head of the household, he is the leader, he is the one responsible for the success of the marriage, the success of the family, the wellbeing of everyone involved. So say what we must, and we must say it about the women's liberation movement, say what we must and will say about feminism and its agenda, say what we will

about the satanic assault on the proper role of a woman, we also cannot ignore the issue of male irresponsibility, the issue of male liberation, which perhaps in the end is even more devastating. It would seem to me that feminism would have a much tougher time surviving, let alone gaining ground, in a world where men understood their responsibility clearly.

And we are asking the question today, and it's a question that all of us ponder: Where are the strong husbands? Where are the loyal, loving, leading husbands and fathers? Where are those men who are the backbone, the solid framework of structure on which you can build a marriage and build a family and build a society? Men have developed their own agendas, their own goals, pursuing their own achievements, living in worlds, for the most part, isolated completely from the family, out of the house, pursuing personal goals, active in their own world of business and passive, largely, in the home. They are in their world aggressive doers, problem solvers, coming up with all kinds of innovative and inventive ways to make money, seeking promotion, prestige, and respect from the strangers in their other world. They are driven to achieve. And in the home, for the most part, they appear passive, indifferent, and irresponsible.

A look at the historical sociological explanation of this would draw us to a quote from one writer who gives us this insight: "A series of historical events, beginning at the Industrial Revolution and traversing the search for American independence in the second great awakening and culminating in Victorianism, has had the net result of disestablishing American men from the true role of fatherhood and moral leadership in our land. The American male, at one time the ever-present guide of the close-knit colonial family, left his family for the factory and the materialistic lure that the Industrial Revolution brought. The most numerous and most active members of the church, the men, who commonly debated theology in the colonial marketplace, were in time to be found arguing business practices in the tavern. The fathers, who labored hard to instill the value of cooperation in their children, in time gave their children the example of unlimited individual competition. Men who once taught their children respect and obedience toward godly authority came to act as though independence were a national virtue. Men who once had an active hand in the education of their sons relegated this responsibility to a public school system dominated by female teachers and feminine learning patterns. Once the leaders of social progress, American men came to look on social reform and mercy movements as women's work and in time became themselves the objects of that social reform, as in the case of movements such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Over the course of 150 years from the mid-18th century to the end of the 19th century, American men walked out on their God-given responsibility for moral and spiritual leadership in the homes, schools, and Sunday schools of the nation."

As sociologist Lawrence Fuchs notes: "The groundwork for the 20th century fatherless home was set. By the end of the 19th century, for the first time it was socially and morally acceptable for men not to be involved with their families."

What you have is a legacy of the Industrial Revolution and what it produced in a materialistic world. What you have is the disappearance of the American husband, the disappearance of the American father. All for initially noble purposes, a better life. But the father left the home and began to cultivate a world completely independent of his own family, a world which his own family knows little of anything about. That has caused subtle and not-so-subtle radical and devastating change.

That kind of change is represented in a rather typical letter from a lady. Listen to this letter. “The kids are in bed. There’s nothing on TV tonight. I asked my husband if he minds if I turn off the tube. He grunts. As I walk to the set, my mind is racing. Maybe – just maybe – tonight we’ll talk, I mean have a conversation that consists of more than my usual question with his mumbled one-word answer or, more accurately, no answer at all – may I interject, something he dare not do at work if he wishes to climb the ladder of success.”

She goes on. “Silence. I live in a world with continuous noise, but between him and me, silence. ‘Please, oh, God, let him open up.’ I initiate once again for the thousandth time, my heart pounds. Oh, how can I word it this time? What can I say that will open the door to just talk? I don’t have to have a deep, meaningful conversation, just something. As I open my mouth,” she goes on, “he gets up and goes to the bedroom. The door closes behind him, the light showing under the door gives way to darkness, and so does my hope. I sit alone on the couch. My heart begins to ache. I’m tired of being alone. Hey, I’m married, I have been for years. Why do I sit alone? The sadness undergoes a change slowly, then with increased fervor, I get mad. I am mad. I’m sick and tired of living with a sissy, a wimp, a coward. You know, he’s afraid of me. Hostile, you say? You better believe it. I’m sick and tired of living in a world of passive men.”

She continues the letter: “My two sons like sports. They’re pretty good. They could be a lot better if their dad would take a little of his precious time and play catch with them. I’m sorry, catch once a year at the church picnic doesn’t quite make the boys into great ball players. But Dad’s too busy, he’s at work, he’s at the health club, he’s riding his four-wheeler, he’s working on the car, he’s playing golf, he’s tired, he’s watching a movie. So who plays catch with the boys? Me. My husband says, ‘You shouldn’t be playing men’s sports.’ So who’s going to do it? He says he will, but he doesn’t. Remember, he’s too busy satisfying himself, doing what he likes. So my poor sons have to be second-rate in sports. They could have been good, really good. My daughter’s a teenager, she likes boys and they notice her. They pay attention to her, she responds. I know what’s coming. I try to talk to her, but it’s not me she wants, it’s Dad. Yeah, Dad. If he’d just hug her, notice her, talk to her – just a little – she wouldn’t need those boys so much. But no. So she turns elsewhere for attention and love and there’s really nothing I can do. A mom isn’t enough. Kids need a father and not just a body, a passive, silent presence.”

And here's the killer: "My husband's father did the same number on him. Didn't hug him, didn't take him to anything, let alone watch his baseball games, and he hates his father. Now my husband's doing the same thing." And she goes on with a few words and ends the letter. She paints a very individual scene but it's not an uncommon one, is it? It just feels like those are the kind of things that all of us know are experienced by women. And we can explain the problem with men sociologically, historically, and I tried to give you somewhat of an insight into that. We can explain it by virtue of the Industrial Revolution and the fact that we have basically created a world outside the home and we don't have much choice but to go there and live in that world. We can explain those things sociologically, but that's really only a force, that's really only a pressure, that's really only a venue of temptation; that's really not the explanation. The explanation for the breakdown of male leadership is the fact that men no longer obey the Word of God.

In fact, throughout our society, most men have no idea what it says and when they find out they're not interested in following it. There are so many passive and indifferent and weak men in the home who, out there in the world, are strong and aggressive. But when it comes to their families, they have abandoned the responsibility to their wives, they have forfeited their character, they have really forfeited their manhood, and they have abandoned their leadership. Therefore, their marriage forfeits the ideal, so does the family, and what do you expect but chaos?

And where can we start? Where can we pick up the pieces of all of this? I think, for Christian men, we have to start here. The heart of being the man God desires you to be is to get a grip on the responsibility you have for the physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of your wife and your family. That's where you begin. Moral and spiritual leadership as well as emotional and physical security, strength and protection, lifelong provision and support, that is what male headship is all about. It's not something mystical; it's something very practical. And if we're ever going to get back men in leadership, it's going to begin in the home. It's going to begin when men take their responsibility given by God, Christian men, for the physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of their wives and families. Far more important than that you have some kind of success in your career – even with a view toward having a good testimony – far more important that you express the unique role that you have as a man, first of all, in your own home.

Now, that takes us back to our text. When we talk about men who are Spirit filled, when we talk men who are godly men in a home, we begin in verse 25 with these words: "Husbands, love your wives." That's the beginning. That's the starting point. Verse 28: "So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies." Colossians chapter 3 adds, in verse 19: "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them." Love them with no mingling of disappointment, frustration, or embitterment. The key word here is "love." It is used six times from verse 25 to 33. And with that first statement comes man's responsibility in his world: love your wives.

Now, if that's all it said, we might fly off into a thousand directions and try to figure out what that means. I watch our society write endless songs about what love is as they poke around and try to figure it out. It always comes out as a feeling. It usually comes out as a feeling that creates irrational behavior. It comes and goes, rises and falls, ebbs and flows. They struggle with a million lyrics to try to figure out what love is. We don't need to struggle, it's right here. "Husbands, love your wives," and then the apostle Paul makes very clear the manner of that love – please notice, verse 25 – "as Christ also loved the church."

It is Christ's love for the church that is the model of the husband's love for his wife. Christ's love for the church sets the model in place. Over in 1 Peter, if I might remind you, 1 Peter 3:7, look at it for just a moment because I want to incorporate this text because I think it's a rich one. Here you have a command to husbands, verse 7, 1 Peter 3: "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." This spells out a dimension of that love that's very important. Your love means to live with your wife in an understanding way. Understand her; that is, to be considerate, not harsh domination – gracious, respectful, understanding. You are to understand God's plan and purpose for marriage. You are to understand your wife's needs, desires, longings, and frustrations. You are to understand her strengths and her weaknesses. And you are to understand how to please God by honoring her as a fellow Christian, a fellow heir of the grace of life. And when you do that, there's a great reward. Your prayers are not hindered.

So this love involves understanding, understanding everything about her, treating her with consideration, bringing strength to her weakness, providing leadership. But getting more specific about that love, we go back to Ephesians chapter 5, and Paul says, first of all, it is a sacrificial love. Look at it in verse 25: "It is as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." It is a love that knows no tyranny, only sacrifice. It is a love that does not exalt itself but humbles itself. As evidenced by the great self-giving of Jesus Christ for unworthy sinners who were His chosen bride, the standard is thus set for this love from husbands. Even if it is undeserved, it is given lavishly and sacrificially.

Second, we saw last time it is a purifying love. Verses 26 and 27: "Christ loved the church enough to sanctify her" – verse 26 – "to cleanse 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." You are to love your wife in such a way that you work toward her godliness. It is a love that sacrifices; it is a love that purifies. In other words, it's a spiritually uplifting love, it's a spiritually beneficial love. It has the effect of making her more holy, of leading her to the place where you allow her full beauty to shine.

The beauty of a woman is not external; the beauty of a woman is internal. It is her glory that shines through her, the work of God in her heart. Man looks on the outward appearance; God looks on the heart. The Bible says, “Women, don’t be concerned about adorning the outside, but adorn your heart.” Husband, it is your responsibility to sacrifice yourself to meet her needs. It is your responsibility to lead her to ever-increasing virtue. Your goal is to give your life on her behalf and to lead her to godliness and virtue, that she should be holy and blameless, even as Christ endeavors to lead His church.

Thirdly, it is a caring love. It is a caring love. Verse 28: “So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself.” Now, what does it mean to love your wife as your own body? Well, it’s just a very simple concept. We take care of our own body, we care for it. If it’s sick, we put it down in bed so it can get better. If it’s hungry, we feed it. If it’s thirsty, we give it to drink. If it’s disheveled, we clean it. We take care of it – feeding, clothing, comforting, whatever. And that’s the essence of this. The issue here is to give attention to meeting needs, to being concerned to fulfill each requirement with great alacrity, great speed, and great devotion. We are called to treat our wives with the same preoccupation we give to ourselves.

Now, notice down in verse 31 – compare this verse, very important. “For this cause” – this is quoting, obviously, from back in Genesis chapter 2 – “For this cause, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” I just bring that in at this point because I want to make a single point out of that. When you got married, you became one. You became one. So in a sense, you are one body. And back, then, in verse 28 when he says, “You ought to love your wives as your own bodies,” you want to remember this, that when you got married, you became one body. And if her needs are met, your needs are met. If her needs are not met, believe me, your needs won’t be met, either. You give her the same care you give yourself. You take care of her as if she were you because you are one in an indivisible oneness. Is that not true? When you were married, you became one flesh. If you want real happiness in your marriage, care for your wife and all her needs with the same devotion you give to yourself because you are inseparable.

We have a little sign that hangs in the kitchen – I don’t know who gave it to us – it’s a good reminder. It says, “If mama ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy.” And I’ll tell you something right now, that goes for you. If you want to be a happy husband, you have a happy wife, right? If you want to be a fulfilled husband, you have a fulfilled wife. You want real happiness in your marriage, then treat her as you treat yourself. You could even embellish that a little bit and say this: Since she is a Christian, remember that she’s not just one with you, but she’s one with Christ as well. Careful how you treat her.

Remember Matthew 18? One of these little ones who believe in Me, if you lead him into sin, lead her into sin, you’d be better off – a millstone hanged around your neck and you were drowned in the depths of the sea. If you cause your spouse to sin, you’d be better off dead. You lead them to

holiness. In that same 18th chapter, Jesus says, “You are to receive these little ones in My name and you’re receiving Me.” You’re not to look down on them, treat them with disrespect. You’re to guard them and protect them, that’s even a compounding responsibility. In marriage, she is one with you, men. In salvation, she is one with Christ. Therefore, you are bound together with Him. He comes to you through her. How you treat her is how you treat Him. If you don’t love your wife in a caring way, you don’t know how to take care of yourself appropriately because you’re going to be miserable. You’re going to be miserable.

So in verse 28, we are to love our wives as our own bodies. And that’s exactly how Christ loves His church – the end of verse 29 – “as Christ also does the church.” Verse 29 says, “No one ever hated his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it, and she is your flesh, you are one flesh, and you must take care of her as yourself.” That’s how Christ cares for His church. He meets the church’s needs. In John 14 verses 13 and 14 we read this: “Whatever you ask in My name” – Jesus said – “that will I do that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.” That’s the Lord Jesus saying to His people, “I will meet your needs.” It’s repeated again in different words – Philippians 4:19 – “My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” God will meet all your needs through Jesus Christ. God says, “Seek first the kingdom and all these things shall be added.” He meets all our needs, not all our wants, but all our needs.

Men, we are the providers, we are the protectors, we are the preservers, we are the resources for our wives and our families, and that is our responsibility. And when their needs are met and we care for them as we would care for ourselves, then we have the kind of relationship that God wants us to have.

Back to Ephesians chapter 5 again, verse 29, which we commented briefly on. I just want to be a little more specific. Paul says, “No one ever hated his own flesh,” and it is not normal to hate yourself. You take care of yourself, that’s normal. You take care of yourself with great concern and great care. And that is precisely the way you are to take care of your spouse. Nobody hates his own flesh; you nourish it, you cherish it, just as Christ also does the church.

So if you want your marriage to be blessed, you take care of your wife. When you know she has a need, you seek to meet it. When you know she has a secret longing in her heart and it’s certainly reasonable and will add to her virtue and her wellbeing and her happiness and her ability to fulfill her role, you do everything you can to meet that need. Something is seriously wrong when a man sees his wife as a cook and a clothes washer and a babysitter and a sex partner and that’s it. Something is seriously wrong when he puts her in the place of the breadwinner. She is a God-given treasure to be cared for, to be cherished, to be nourished, to be your loving helper, to fulfill your need for companionship, for the fulfillment of physical desire, for the fulfillment of love and partnership and friendship and to produce children in a home.

Notice those two terms, “nourish” and “cherish” in verse 29. Nourish means to feed, *ektrephe*. It’s a word used primarily of bringing up children. It’s used over in chapter 6 verse 4 where it says, “Bring them up.” We think about bringing up our children, we think about nourishing, feeding, developing, nurturing our children, but do we think of that with regard to our wives? I think most men just disregard that responsibility, see the wife as responsible for the kids, and go charging out into their own world. We are responsible to nourish her so she, in her marvelous role, can effectively nourish the children as she has been given opportunity.

Then the word “cherish” literally means – beautiful word – to warm with body heat. It’s sometimes translated “to melt.” It means to soften. It is used of a mother bird who just pulls in all the little baby birds and keeps them all cozy and warm in her feathers. It means to provide a nest, warmth, security, to soften her to a meek and quiet spirit, to support her, to care for her. I tell you, pretty challenging in the world in which we live today when women are raised to be tough and independent. It takes a great man, it takes a tremendous amount of spiritual leadership to soften a woman, to warm a woman, to melt her down to a meek and quiet spirit, to provide a nest and security and strength and warmth.

She is not the nourisher. She is not the provider. You’re to do that. That is the man’s responsibility. And if a man doesn’t do that, according to 1 Timothy 5:8, he is denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. Throughout Scripture, the man is always the provider as Christ is the provider for His church. That’s key. We provide nothing. The church provides nothing. We just receive Christ’s provision, protection, preservation, His care, His nourishing, His cherishing. It comes to us. In a sense, it’s very one-sided. Men, we are to provide that in our homes. You say, “Well, I’d have to sacrifice my career to do that.” Then sacrifice it. Maybe you can’t climb as fast and as far up the ladder as you would like, but in the end you’re going to be so richly rewarded in the bliss of that home that it will be far worth every sacrifice. Christ provides everything for us, to nurture us, to warm us, to provide the security for us.

Thinking back, for a moment, to the curse in Genesis 3. The woman was cursed, pain in childbearing. The man was cursed. Remember how he was cursed? He was going to be cursed in making a living. Remember that? Up to that point, you know, they could eat anything, didn’t have to work, there was no tilling of the ground, there was no harvesting of anything, you just went around and picked it up. There was no need to sow it, it was just recycling itself in that pristine, pre-fall world, and there was an abundance of everything, and all you had to do was just reach up and take it. And then what happened? Man sinned and the ground was cursed, and he was going to have to provide for his wife and his family by hard labor.

That was the curse, that the ground would not bring forth its produce readily or easily. He was going to have to work very hard to provide. And the woman was going to have pain in her childbearing, and

she was going to have to battle her desire to lead and to be in charge, and submit herself. How fascinating that is to me because the curse was a direct hit on the specific responsibility that God gave men and women. Man's specific responsibility was as a provider, and that's right where the curse hit him, and that provision is difficult to obtain. And a woman, her responsibility, have children and submit, and she was cursed right in that very area through the pain of childbearing and the struggle of submission. It's not easy, and I'm not saying it is easy. In fact, it's so difficult, I think it can only be fulfilled in the power of the Spirit of God and a transformed life.

So the husband is to care for the wife as Christ cares for the church – verse 30 – “because we are members of His body.” He does it because we are one with Him. We need to do it with our wives because we are one with them. That's the point. We are His body and she is our body. As Christ who is one body with His church cares for His church, so the husband who is one body with his wife cares for his wife. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit, 1 Corinthians 6:17 says. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. And He cares for us because we are one with Him. And that's the picture of how we are to care for our wives because they are one with us. In fact, people who violate this – men, let me tell you: When you don't do this, you really are committing a kind of suicide because once married to that woman, there is a one-flesh relationship. And if that marriage is destroyed, something in you is destroyed. It is forgivable; it is not repairable. The grace of God is amazing. It brings full forgiveness for our failures, but you can't necessarily put the pieces back together. The scars will always be there.

So the model for loving your wives, gentlemen, is this: You are to love them as Christ loved the church. How does He love His church? By giving His life for it, by pursuing its holiness, and by caring for it so that all of its needs are met. It is a sacrificial, a purifying, and a caring love.

Fourthly, it is an unbreakable love. It is an unbreakable love. Verse 31, “For this cause” – and here is a quote from Genesis 2:24, also quoted by our Lord in Matthew 19:5. Here is the quote from Genesis – this was God's original design before the fall – “For this cause, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a coming together of a man and a woman, leaving their family, creating a new union with a unique identity all its own that is called a one-flesh relationship. Now, what does it mean, “one flesh”? The primary reference is to the sexual union because the sexual union is what yields the most obvious evidence that the two have become one, which is the birth of the child that carries the genetics of both parents. That child is the true emblem of the oneness of a physical union.

Back in 1 Corinthians 6:16, Paul says, “Do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her?” Oh, so that oneness is when you join sexually – that's right – then it says in that same verse, 1 Corinthians 6:16, “For He says the two will become one flesh.” You become one flesh in the physical relationship. That's where you share life. When the life of the man is shared with the life of the woman, in the intimacy of that physical relationship, that is the one flesh. Even a man who is joined to a harlot becomes one flesh with her. It's not some mystical marital union, it's not some

spiritual, emotional union. It is the union that is on the physical level, first of all. It goes beyond that. It engulfs everything about our life. Emotions certainly come into play. It becomes unique and personal, but it starts with that physical relationship.

So in Ephesians again, God's design as indicated back in Genesis is that a man and a woman leave their respective families and come together, clinging to each other, and enter into a physical union. They become one flesh and they cling to each other. This oneness is intimate, unique, and personal. This oneness is special. Individual identity is lost. Did you get that? Individual identity is lost. You become, really, a new person, comingled with your life partner. "And what God has joined together, let not man put asunder." That's why God hates divorce because divorce severs that indissoluble, indivisible relationship.

Would you notice the word "leave" in verse 31? It's a very intense word. It's another one of those verbs with a preposition on the front of it, *kataleip*. It means to leave behind, it means to abandon – literally, leave. And, of course, we have to give advice about that lots of times to young couples who have started to cleave but forgotten to leave, which is very helpful. The word "cleave," *proskolla*, it means to be glued to. You come together to stick, oneness of physical union which incorporates oneness of mind, oneness of purpose, oneness of heart, oneness of emotion. And you enter into this most private, magnificent, intimate, personal relationship.

It even appalls me, all these books that are written about how to express your physical relationship. Certainly somewhere along the line enough information has circulated, and if it hasn't, you can certainly find out rather quickly what ought to happen in the physical dimension. And when you sort of blatantly parade all of this stuff, you cheapen it. The magnificent beauty of intimacy belongs in the marriage bed. Hebrews 13:2 is so, so beautiful – Hebrews 13:4, rather. It says, "Let marriage be held in honor among all and let the marriage bed be undefiled." You can also translate that in an indicative mode: The marriage bed is undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers, God will judge.

There's something wonderful about that marriage bed, about that union, something personal and intimate and private and magnificent as two people come together in a relationship that in and of itself is God's perfect and private and special union that they share. It is an unbreakable union. That's why the Bible condemns divorce. That's why in Malachi, it says, "God spoke and said, 'I hate divorce.'" Malachi 2:16, "The Lord, the God of Israel, says He hates divorce." God hates anything that breaks up this union. And what is it that assaults this union? Sin. Sure.

You say, "Well I want to keep my marriage together but, boy, he's a bear to live with, this guy." Or a man might say, "I'd like to keep this marriage together, too, but I don't know if I can live with this woman." I've actually had men say to me – and not just a few but quite a number, "What would happen if I divorced my wife without Biblical cause?" Well my answer has always been, "I don't know. I know you're in direct violation of Scripture and I know God will not bless that. And there's a

reasonable assumption that God will chasten that and you may come under serious chastening from God.” And I’ve had men say to me on not a few occasions, “Okay, I’ll take it. I would much rather put myself under the chastening of God than live with this woman.” Really. Say that.

You know what that indicates to me? They have reached a point where they are either so sinful in their own lives that they themselves are at fault and have alienated that woman or perhaps more likely they have ceased to understand how to forgive. You know what happens? It doesn’t take a lot of stuff to get to that point, it just takes a continual pattern of unforgiveness and it just accumulates. It just accumulates.

How many times does the Lord forgive you? All day, every day? And His love never changes and His love never wanes and you’re still His chosen bride and He’s still going to bring you to glory? How many times are we to forgive each other? Peter asked that, didn’t he, in Matthew 18? “How many times shall I forgive? Seven times?” Jesus said seventy times seven. Seventy times seven.

So you love your wife with a sacrificial love. You love your wife with a purifying love. You love your wife with a caring love that nourishes her and cherishes her. You love your wife with an unbreakable love that just keeps forgiving and forgiving and forgiving and forgiving. Can a man cast off his wife? I can answer that question with a question. Can Christ cast off His church?

And at this point, it would be appropriate to give a warning to you young people: Pick carefully, it’s for life. Pick wisely, it’s for life. You say, “Oh, boy, it makes me nervous.” It ought to make you nervous. You say, “Well what’s the key to picking wisely?” Simple. Be filled with the Spirit, walking in a godly way so that your mind is tuned to the will of God. That’s why when young couples in for counseling here, the first thing we ask them when they want to get married, they come in for premarital counseling, is, “Are you involved with each other physically?” Because if they are, they’re in a sinful condition, and people in a sinful condition can’t discern the will of God, right? So you have to separate and live a godly life so that you can understand a mind of the Spirit and the will of God can be expressed through your life, then you’ll know. I always tell young people, “Don’t worry about finding the right person; worry about being the right person.” And if you’re the right person, then the person God has for you will recognize you.

Now, what do you look for? Let me give you some suggestions. This is for those of you who aren’t married and you know it’s for life. First of all, find out someone’s reputation. Proverbs 22:1 says, “A good name is better than riches.” Find out someone’s reputation. A good name is better than riches. Try to avoid a reclamation project and wait until the Spirit of God has done that. Hey, we’re all reclamation projects, aren’t we? But let the Spirit of God do that before you jump in at square one. The idea of marriage is not so that you can lead her to Christ. I think that’s what I’m saying.

Secondly, “Favor is deceitful, beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.” Find someone who worships the Lord from the heart. Look for reputation, look for a worshiping heart, listen to what they say because out of the abundance of the heart – what? – the mouth speaks. What’s the conversation like? You can check out companions. What kind of people do they run with? Shallow people? Deep people? Godly people? First Corinthians 15:33 says, “Evil company corrupts good morals.” And check out their wardrobe. You say, “Really?” Absolutely. Check out their wardrobe because godly women are not so much concerned with the outward adornment of the body as they are the inward adornment. And when they do call attention to themselves, they call attention to their virtue. Well, enough said at that point.

The manner of love in our passage here, sacrificial, purifying, caring, and unbreakable. Let’s talk about the motive. What should motivate us to love like this? Verse 32: “This mystery is great but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.” Why should I love this woman like this? Why should I love her sacrificially? Why should I love her to the degree that I lead her to holiness, that I care for her? Why should I commit myself to an unbreakable love which means I relentlessly forgive her and never become embittered? Motive? Because of the sacredness of marriage. That’s the issue. Because of the sacredness of marriage. Marriage isn’t just marriage; marriage is a mystery. A marriage among Christians is a picture of Christ and His church. This mystery is great. And you need to treat marriage with reverence and awe because marriage is a sacred symbol of Christ’s relationship to His church.

And then one final word. Verse 33 just reviews everything. “Nevertheless, let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself, and let the wife see to it that she respects her husband.”

It isn’t that tough to understand this. But you can’t fulfill it apart from being Spirit filled. You have to go all the way back, don’t you, back all the way in this text to verse 18, filled with the Spirit, a heart filled with song and joy, thankful for everything, an attitude of submission. You see, where the Spirit of God is in control, this can come to pass. The commitment of two people to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, filled with worship and thanks, devoted to submitting to each other in humble love – I’ll tell you, that’ll bring romance. That’ll put springtime in a marriage and it’ll keep it there.

A lot of marriages break up after the kids go. Have you noticed? A lot of them. And I suppose I used to wonder what marriage would be like when you weren’t chasing them all around, when your whole life wasn’t seemingly focused on them. You know, in those early years, control is the issue. Just get those kids in control. Obedience, line them up, help them to learn how to think and how to act and how to react and how to submit and how to obey, and you work hard on that. Then they go off to school, and then it’s homework for years and years. And you’re focused on the homework, every night, papers, papers, and, “Daddy, could you please explain this to me?” “Could you help me draw this?” “I don’t understand this.” Or “Daddy, I got a bad grade on this. Could you talk to the teacher? I don’t understand.” And your life is just focused all over the place.

And then it's Little League, and then it's soccer games, or whatever, and then it's football games and baseball games and I tell you – and piano lessons and then you have to go to some place to buy clothes for all of these kids. And that goes on and on. You know, your whole life is focused on that. And then they get to the age where they have friends, and they all come over to your house. And now you've got to sort all those friends out and say, "You know, I don't think this person is a really good influence." The energy expended in just coordinating this, to say nothing of the taxi service that goes with it, your whole life is just focused on all these kids.

And you – then they get to the age where they start to think about serious relationships, and then it really gets serious. I'll tell you. Now, I pretty well had my boys wired by the time they got to the place where they were going to choose. And you know how they knew what to choose? Well, they loved their mother and she was kind of the standard. But the girls, I was protective. I confess. You know, I mean it's a – you spend your whole life protecting your daughter. Right? Just protect her, protect her, and then one day she's going to marry some guy and you just say, "Here." And not only did I have to say that, I had to pronounce them man and wife. I mean, that's a pretty traumatic moment.

And then your life is just focused on this, and you want to get them to the right place and get them to the right partner, and you want to help them as they go through that process of sorting all of that out and lead them into the right study and get them through school and you're – and then all of a sudden, they're gone. And I've seen some pretty apparently noble servants of the Lord, even in ministry, have their whole life collapse in front of them at that point. When the truth of the matter is, you should be on your second honeymoon when they're gone. You should look at each other and say, "Boy, we've waited a long time for this."

I have to tell you, you know, it's the best of times at our house. You know what? We – it was okay when they went, but you know what's happened? They're back. Only they're back with little tiny kids and we're saying, in the famous words of Yogi Berra, "This is *déjà vu* all over again." You know?

You spend a tremendous amount of time and energy and in our complex world, it's so diverse that there's a certain disconnection in all these activities of our kids. We take them here, we take them there, we take them here, we take them there. It's not all happening in the cohesion of that family, is it? Father's over here, one kid's over here, another one's over here, another one's over here, and it's all scattered. Do we have breakfast together? Maybe. Do we have dinner together? Hardly. Splattered all over every place. All that tremendous diverse energy, and when that all is gone, a husband and a wife have to face each other and see if there's anything there. And it can be the best of times. That's the way God designed it.

If you haven't kept the list of the offenses, if there is no such list, if you are as good at forgetting sins and failures as God is at forgetting yours, if you have cultivated a sacrificial love to that wife, a

purifying love, a caring love and an unbreakable love, you will be rewarded, she will be rewarded. It can be and should be the best of times.

It's sad when it kind of declines, isn't it? I read a *Saturday Evening Post* old article called, "The Seven Stages of the Married Cold."

Stage one, first year of marriage: "Sugar, I'm so worried about you. You've got a sniffle and there's no telling about such things. I'm going to put you in the hospital today for a general checkup and some rest. I know the food's lousy at the hospital, so I'll have your meals catered. And I've already arranged it with the floor superintendent."

Second year: "Listen, darling, I just don't like the sound of that cough and I've called Doc Miller to rush over here. Now, you go to bed like a good girl. Please?"

Third year: "Maybe you better lie down, honey. Nothing like a little rest when you don't feel well. Have you got any soup?"

Fourth year: "Look, dear, be sensible. After you feed the kids and get the dishes washed, you better lay down."

Fifth year: "Why don't you get yourself a couple of aspirin?"

Sixth year: "For Pete's sake, stop sneezing. You're going to give me pneumonia."

Seventh year: "You know, if you'd just gargle, you wouldn't be sitting around barking like a seal."

Well, does it have to be that way? Not in God's plan. Billy Sunday said, "Gentlemen, try praising your wife even if it frightens her."

Worthiness is not the issue. It's not the issue with Christ. He's tender, sensitive – forgiving toward us. We're speaking about a divine ideal and it's not too late for us, no matter what may be the condition of our marriages. And, gentlemen, it's going to start with you when you love your wife as Christ loved His church and loves His church. That's where to rebuild the whole thing. And that's going to happen when you begin to come back to where you need to be in your own spiritual life. Get the garbage out of your life, get back into the Word of God, get back into living an obedient life. Get your focus where it belongs, on Christ, and then on that little family that God has given you as a piece of His kingdom to disciple. And put your whole heart there and watch how God rewards that. Let's pray.

Father, it's so wonderful to be taken back to the Word and have a foundation to build on. And, Lord, I know there are many who may feel a certain sadness because we've been speaking about a divine ideal and many perhaps have already lost that. Some have come from divorces and messed-up

marriages and some are struggling right now. And, Lord, we know it's not an issue of forgiveness. You forgive, we understand that. You forgive. And sometimes there are men who have tried to do what's right and they thought they married a Christian but they didn't. And it was Christ against Satan in the home. Sometimes it was a wife who just decided to live iniquitous lifestyle, who engaged in sin and shattered the best attempts of husband's. Whatever. We know You forgive – that's not the issue. The only issue is, Lord, that wherever we are right now, we get back to being the men You want us to be. Forget the past, begin now. Lord, we ask for Your grace, Your strength, Your wisdom, that we might be what You want us to be as husbands – and wives. And as husbands, we might love our wives and the wives respect their husbands.

Oh, Lord, give us homes filled with joy because we have followed the pattern laid out for us in Your power and by Your grace for the glory of our Savior. Amen.

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