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## DO YOU REALLY LOVE YOUR WIFE? (Part 2)

Ephesians 5:25-33

By

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August 24, 2008

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Ephesians Lesson 50

## Do You Really Love Your Wife? (Part 2) Ephesians 5:25-33

Kids sometimes have some humorous insights on love and marriage. When asked, "How does a person decide who to marry?" Allan (age 10) said, "You got to find somebody who likes the same stuff. Like if you like sports, she should like it that you like sports, and she should keep the chips and dip coming." Kirsten (age 10) replied, "No person really decides before they grow up who they're going to marry. God decides it all way before, and you got to find out later who you're stuck with."

What do most people do on a date? Lynnette (age 8) says, "Dates are for having fun, and people should use them to get to know each other. Even boys have something to say if you listen long enough." Martin (age 10) has some youthful wisdom: "On the first date, they just tell each other lies, and that usually gets them interested enough to go for a second date."

Is it better to be single or married? Anita (age 9) says, "It's better for girls to be single but not for boys. Boys need somebody to clean up after them!" Kenny (age 7) says, "It gives me a headache to think about that stuff. I'm just a kid. I don't need that kind of trouble."

Why love happens between two people: Jan (age 9) says, "No one is sure why it happens, but I heard it has something to do with how you smell. That's why perfume and deodorant are so popular." Harlen (age 8) says, "I think you're supposed to get shot with an arrow or something, but the rest of it isn't supposed to be so painful."

What is falling in love like? Roger (age 9) says, "Like an avalanche where you have to run for your life." Greg (age 8) says, "Love is the most important thing in the world, but baseball is pretty good too."

When is it okay to kiss someone? Pam (age 7) says, "When they're rich!" Curt (age 7) is more cautious: "The law says you have to be 18, so I wouldn't mess with that." Howard (age 8) is a bit

more responsible: "The rule goes like this: If you kiss someone, then you should marry them and have kids with them. It's the right thing to do." Jean (age 10) says, "It's never okay to kiss a boy. They always slobber all over you. That's why I stopped doing it."

How to make a marriage work: Ricky (age 7) says, "Tell your wife that she looks pretty even if she looks like a truck!" Bobby (age 9) says, "Be a good kisser. It might make your wife forget that you never take out the trash." Roger (age 8) says, "Don't forget your wife's name. That will mess up the love."

We are considering the question, "Do you *really* love your wife?" We have seen that...

Christlike love should characterize each husband's relationship with his wife.

Last time we saw that...

1. Love is the priority for husbands.
2. Love is possible for all husbands.
3. Love is portrayed as a self-sacrificing, caring commitment that shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved.

"Love is self-sacrificing," just as "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (5:25).

"Love is caring," just as a man nourishes and cherishes his own flesh, as Christ does the church (5:29).

"Love is a commitment," as implied by the command to love, by Christ's covenant love for us, and by the analogy of the body.

"Love shows itself," that is, it is not just words, but also deeds, as seen by Christ's going to the cross for us.

"Love seeks the highest good of the one loved," just as Christ died for us so that He might sanctify and cleanse us, to present us to Himself in all our glory, as holy and blameless (5:26-27).

We also looked at two of ten contrasts to help understand God's perspective on a husband's love for his wife:

- (1) Love is sacrificial, not selfish.

(2) Love is purposeful, not aimless, effortless ecstasy.

We saw that there is an *exclusive purpose* in married love (“sanctified,” set apart exclusively unto God). There is a *purifying purpose* (cleansed by the washing of water with the word). And, there is an *edifying purpose* (no spot or wrinkle, but holy and blameless). We continue now with the rest of the contrasts.

(3) Love is realistic, not blind.

While married love aims at the high ideal of a bride who is without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, it is not unrealistic. A godly husband accepts his wife for who she is and graciously, patiently works with her to help her become all that God intends for her to be. The fact that a wife is far from perfect does not detract a husband from his steadfast love for her.

As we saw, husbands are to love their wives just as Christ loved the church (5:25). What kind of church did Christ love? Was she perfect, or close to it? Hardly! Even as He went to the cross, Jesus predicted Peter’s denials and that the disciples all would fall away because of Him (Mark 14:27, 30). Read the New Testament and you will easily see that the churches were far from perfect.

Look at your own life since coming to salvation. Have you perfectly obeyed Jesus Christ? Has your love for Him always been fervent? Have you always kept yourself pure and devoted only to Him? And yet, in spite of your many failures, He loves you with a steadfast, committed love!

One of the questions that I ask couples in premarital counseling is, “Knowing that no one is perfect, name at least five faults in your fiancé.” My aim is not to get couples to find fault with each other, but rather to determine if they’re entering marriage with their eyes wide open. If they can only name one or two faults, they’re going to be in for a rude awakening after the honeymoon (if not before!).

Invariably, when couples come in for marriage counseling, they are blaming one another. He blames her for being angry and she blames him for being indifferent or insensitive. Speaking to husbands (because our text does), your wife is imperfect, just as the church is imperfect. But Christ calls you to love her anyway with the kind of steadfast love that helps her to grow in godliness. If you

need an example, study Hosea, who loved an unfaithful wife as an example of God's love to adulterous Israel!

(4) Love is initiating, not dependent on a response.

The book of Ephesians (and all of Scripture) is clear that God took the initiative in loving us and drawing us to salvation. One of the most prevalent heresies of our day is that God's sovereign election only means that He looked down through history and saw in advance that I would believe, so He chose me for salvation. But that would mean that election was not based on God's grace alone, but on some good that He foresaw in me! But Scripture is plain (Rom. 5:8), "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Applied to husbands, this means that you must continually initiate and demonstrate self-sacrificing love for your wife, regardless of her response. If you think, "Well, I'll go 50-50, or even, 75-25," that's not enough. You've got to give 100 percent love, even if she's being disagreeable or difficult to live with. If you respond to her anger with your anger, it only escalates alienation. I encourage every husband (and wife) to memorize 1 Peter 3:8-9, which follows immediately on his counsel to wives and husbands: "To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit, not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing." Love takes the initiative; it is not dependent on a response from the one loved.

(5) Love is unconditional, not conditioned on performance.

This is the outworking of the previous point. You not only initiate love when it is undeserved. You also must steadily maintain love over the long haul, even when your wife is not being particularly lovely. I've heard many husbands complain, "She's an angry woman and she isn't submissive to me! If she would just calm down and submit as she is supposed to, I'd be able to love her." But, the husband's job is not to get his wife to submit to him or to love her only when she is lovable, but to love her just as Christ loves an often disobedient church.

This does not mean that you never confront your wife with regard to her sin. Many husbands err here. Perhaps his wife is fre-

quently angry, but rather than patiently, lovingly helping her acknowledge and overcome her anger, he runs for cover so that he can get some relief. Or, he sinfully confronts her anger with his fiercer anger, to let her know that she can't intimidate him. Neither approach is godly.

A Christlike husband is not quarrelsome, but kind and patient, even when wronged (2 Tim. 2:24-25). He gently, but with determination comes alongside his wife and teaches her, "Your anger does not glorify God. I want to help you be a godly woman. Let's see what God's Word says about how to overcome anger." By example and by teaching, he helps her to grow in godliness. That's how Christ deals with His bride the church. That's how a loving husband must deal with his wife, even when she is not all that she is supposed to be.

(6) Love is a total sharing of life, not two independent lives.

Paul says (5:28-29), "So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church." He is *not* encouraging us to learn to love ourselves so that we can love our wives! That is modern psychobabble. Rather, he is pointing out the fact that normal people love their bodies, as seen by the way that we care for our bodies and protect them from danger. His point is that your wife *is* a part of your body, just as we (the church) are members of Christ's body (5:30). A husband and wife are one flesh (5:31). When you love her, you are loving your own body.

It's an amazing picture, that the wife actually is a part of the husband's body! Paul is probably going back to the creation of Eve, who was not created out of the dust of the ground, as Adam was. Rather, she was taken out of his body, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh (Gen. 2:23).

This has profound implications for Christian marriage. For one thing, if your wife is hurting, you are hurting! If you are insensitive to her pain, you are denying the fact that she is your body. If you coldly ignore her feelings and say, "I couldn't care less how you feel," you are ignoring yourself. If you attack her with harsh words, you're attacking yourself. It would be as if a man hit his

thumb with a hammer and then said, "You stupid thumb! Why did you get in the way? You deserve to hurt for being so dumb! I'm going to hit you again, just to teach you a lesson!" That would be crazy! And yet, that's how many men treat their wives.

A husband who becomes so engrossed with his career that he ignores his wife is committing the same error, of living independently of his wife. It's like trying to live apart from your body. Some years ago, a reporter asked the new head coach of a professional football team if his wife objected to his 18-hour workdays. He replied, "I don't know. I don't see her that much." I don't know if they're still married, but that coach was not sharing his life with his wife as if she were his own body. At the very least, this analogy means that a husband must spend a lot of time with his wife, sharing his life with her and allowing her to share her life with him.

(7) Love is responsible, not irresponsible.

Paul writes (5:28-30) that husbands must nourish and cherish their wives, "just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body." This reveals at least two ways that husbands must demonstrate responsible love for their wives.

- Love provides; it is not lazy.

*Nourish* has the nuance of feeding. Every man feeds his own body. Every husband is responsible to feed his wife. This includes material provisions, such as the basic necessities of food and covering. A lazy man who refuses to work to provide for his family has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8).

But beyond that, nourishing also implies that a husband cares about his wife's total well being and he exerts himself to provide for her in every way. He makes the effort to provide for her emotionally and spiritually. At the very least, this means taking the initiative to bring your wife and children to church every Sunday, where you all can be fed nourishing food from God's Word. Do not go to a church that serves spiritual junk food. Go to a church where your family gets fed and then talk later about the things you are learning.

Also, read the Bible and pray together as a family. Read good Christian books and talk about them. Listen to other sound Bible

teachers, such as John Piper, John MacArthur, and others. Occasionally, go to a good conference, such as the Ligonier Conference that will be in Scottsdale in September. Take the initiative in providing spiritual food for your wife and children.

- Love is caring, not callous.

Love *cherishes*. The word means “warmth,” and pictures a mother tenderly holding her infant against her to keep it warm from the cold (Paul uses the Greek verb of a mother in 1 Thess. 2:7, where the NASB translates, “tenderly cares”). Again, this verb stems from the analogy of the wife actually being part of the husband’s body. If your hands get cold on a winter day, you don’t say, “Stupid hands, stay out in the cold for all I care!” Rather, you put them inside your coat and tenderly warm them again. Responsible love nourishes and cherishes your wife.

- (8) Love is emotionally mature, not immature.

In verse 31, Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This was written about Adam and Eve, neither of whom had a mother or father! So it was given for our instruction, to show us that a man must be mature enough to leave his parents before he enters into marriage.

I’ve encountered husbands who expect the same treatment from their wife as they got from their mother! They expect her to clean the house, buy the groceries, manage the money, and generally take care of them, while they go play with their buddies. That is immature, to say the least! A husband must leave his parents so that he can be joined to his wife and lead her in a mature, responsible manner. He should be her leader, not her little boy!

- (9) Love is a permanent commitment, not a temporary arrangement.

“Be joined to” (5:31) means, “to be glued to.” That means when you get married, you’re stuck! Marriage creates a new, one-flesh identity of head and body. It is the permanent commitment that enables a couple to work through difficulties, as every couple has to do. I advise every couple to remove the words “divorce” and “separation” from your vocabularies. Even in the heated emotions



of a disagreement, *never* threaten to leave! As we have seen, marriage isn't just about our happiness. It's an earthly picture of Christ and the church. For a husband to threaten to leave his wife when there is a problem would be like Christ threatening to leave His bride, the church. But (Heb. 13:5b), "He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.'"

(10) Love is growing, exclusive intimacy, not a casual relationship.

Paul cites (5:31) Genesis 2:24, which lays the foundation of marriage as a one flesh relationship. When God instituted marriage, it was between a *man* and a *woman*, not between two people of the same sex, which is an abomination to God. It was also between *one* man and *one* woman, not between one man and many women, whether at the same time or in serial fashion. Although God tolerated polygamy in the Old Testament, it never reflected His original design for marriage and it always created problems. The same is true of divorce. God's design is that one man and one woman be joined exclusively for life.

"One flesh" refers primarily to the sexual union. Paul says that even when a man has sex with a prostitute, he becomes one flesh with her (1 Cor. 6:16). God has designed the sexual union to create this intimate, one flesh relationship, even when it is a one-time event! But it is to be confined within the boundary of lifelong marriage in order to deepen the relationship between a husband and wife. Casual sex, outside of the permanence of marriage, is *never* an expression of love, but only of lust.

Marriage is a great mystery, in that it is an earthly picture of Christ and the church (5:32). Sex in the Bible is often described as a man *knowing* his wife. A husband and wife's sexual union is a sacred picture of the intimate, face-to-face knowledge that we share with our heavenly Bridegroom. Jesus said that there will not be any marriage in heaven (Matt. 22:30). I've often said to Marla, "How can heaven be heaven if I can't be married to you?" The biblical answer is, in heaven there will be no need for the picture, because the reality will have come. We will be married to our heavenly Bridegroom for all eternity. Therefore, we must guard ourselves so that we keep ourselves sexually only for our mates. The picture of Christ and His church is at stake!

## Conclusion

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

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

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

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

"What do you mean?"

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

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

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

## Application Questions

1. Love accepts imperfections, but when a mate is repeatedly sinful, isn't there a point where you say, "That's it"? Is divorce ever justified when a mate is just plain difficult to live with?
2. What do you do when there is something about your mate that you just don't like? Is it ever right to try to change her/him?
3. How can a husband who feels spiritually inferior to his wife provide for her spiritual well-being? Where does he begin?
4. What should a wife with an immature, irresponsible husband do? Should she try to change him or just accept him as is?

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