

As Christ Loved the Church

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Introduction.

- A. In modern America, marriage is an endangered institution. The most recent statistics tell us that 40 percent of all first-time marriages end in divorce, and for second and third marriages, the divorce rate is even higher. This epidemic has massive consequences in both the physical and the spiritual realm. Millions and millions of people spend their lives battling the trauma caused during their childhood by their parents' divorce, and as many more are separated from their God by daring to tear apart what He has bound together.
- B. A problem as complex as the problem of divorce has many different causes, but one of the most significant is the national confusion about the role of men and the role of women in marriage. Fifty years ago, divorce was both disgraceful and rare. Since that time, the so-called Feminist Revolution appeared on the scene. Many of the leading social thinkers of the day urged women to refuse to follow the lead of their husbands any longer, to demand to be treated as the equal of men in every respect, to fight for their rights. The consequences of this philosophy are predictable and tragic. On a football team with eleven quarterbacks, the ball never even gets snapped. In a marriage with two heads, sooner or later, the heads go in different directions.
- C. God's word presents a totally different view of marriage. It defines two different roles for the sexes in marriage, roles that are equally important, but roles that complement rather than confront each other. We see the role of the man defined in Ephesians 5:25-28. This is an extremely familiar passage. In fact, I may well have heard more sermons preached on Ephesians 5 than on any other passage in the Bible, an indication of the way we have allowed the modern marriage crisis to infiltrate even the church.
- D. However, if we limit our study of men and marriage to these four verses, we're really missing the point of the Scripture. Paul doesn't want us men only to consider his two-sentence thumbnail sketch of Jesus; he wants us to look at ALL the things Jesus does for His church and then figure out ways to do those things for our wives. When we ponder them in this light, the Gospels become not only a record of the life of Christ, but also a divinely inspired manual on how to be a good husband. Understanding everything that the Bible has to say to men in this vein is the work of a lifetime, but let's pull just a few things out, so that we can learn to love our wives as Christ loved the church.

I. Giving a Blessing.

- A. One of the biggest challenges I face in loving my wife in this way is consistency. Sometimes, when I'm really happy with her or just on a spiritual high, I find that I WANT to treat her the way that I should be treating her. Other times, though, doing the right thing is harder. I get my back up over some stupid little thing, and I no longer want to treat her with the kindness and respect that I owe her. I grumble in my head, "I know that I should help her out by doing this, but she doesn't deserve it."
- B. The problem with this way of thinking is that the Bible does NOT tell us to base our treatment of others on what we think they deserve or even what they actually do deserve. Instead, God commands us to deal righteously with others even when they deal unrighteously with us. Consider 1 Peter 3:8-9. We are not to be people who return evil for evil. We are to bless instead.
- C. This principle is important in every area of our lives, but it is particularly important in marriage. Here's the application: This means that I have to treat my wife right whether she treats me right or not! Thankfully, I am married to the most wonderful woman in the world, so this is as easy for me as it can possibly be, but even if I weren't, I would still have to treat her right if I wanted to be pleasing to God. Even if my wife is the most relentless nag in the whole entire world, even if she chews me out in public, even if what I want is the farthest thing from her mind, I still have to consistently give to her what God tells me I should.

II. Six Ideals Jesus Exemplified.

- A. Now that we've got that down, let's look quickly at six ways Jesus showed His love for the church in ways we can emulate with our wives. To begin with, Jesus' love was reflected in His **LEADERSHIP**. As we see in 1 Peter 2:21, Jesus intended for us to follow His example, in suffering and in everything else. If we want to be true men of God, we must also provide this kind of spiritual leadership for our families. Sadly, in many families, it is the wife who is forced by the apathy of her husband to take charge, but this is not God's intent. It doesn't make any more sense than it would for Christ to take His cue from the church. We can't let this happen in our families. We have to be the ones who are leading our families to services, the ones who are leading our families in prayer, the ones who are leading our families in doing Bible lessons, and the ones who are leading our families in righteous living. We have to be the ones who are leading. Christ does this for the church, and we must do this for our wives.

- B. As important as this is, all the leadership in the world doesn't help unless we also follow Christ in having a **PURPOSE**. Part of what makes Jesus such a wonderful role model as a leader is that He always knew what He was doing and where He was going. Let's look at Luke 19:9-10. Jesus had a purpose on earth—to seek and to save the lost—and everything He did was geared toward that purpose. We ought to be the same way. As husbands and heads of our families, our most important goal on earth must be to get our families to heaven, and we ought to consider every decision we make in light of that goal. Sure, the new job we've been offered might be a plum, but if it has us living 100 miles from the nearest church, we ought to think twice. If we want to be the best husbands we can be, we need to live with the sole purpose in mind of serving God.
- C. Although this is true, there's more to loving our wives as Christ loved the church than just the stern ideals of leadership and purpose. We also need to imitate Jesus in His **COMPASSION**. Sometimes, if we have a very goal-oriented and businesslike mindset, we can fall into the trap of marching our wives around like little tin soldiers. The compassion of Jesus calls us to consider not just our goals, but also our wives' needs and even weaknesses. Matthew 9:36 gives us an example. Rather than just abstractly pursuing His destiny, Jesus took the frailties of those around Him into account. He had fellow-feeling for them. He looked at the world through their eyes. We need to deal with our wives in the same way. If she's had a rotten day at work and stumbles through the front door on the verge of tears, we need to recognize it and understand that now is maybe not the time to start asking when dinner will be ready. We need to be willing to alter our view of the way things should be to fit her circumstances. We need to be compassionate.
- D. Just as we should consider leadership, purpose, and compassion in Jesus, so too we should pay attention to His love as it was expressed in **SERVICE**. This is a hard one for us to get our heads around sometimes. We naturally think that if we're the ones in charge, that means we call all the shots and get to have things our way. Sadly, I suspect this is a big part of the problem that our country has. If so many men hadn't tried to be the dictators of their households, we might never have had the Feminist Revolution. The Biblical picture of what it means to be a leader is found in Matthew 20:26-28. Jesus WAS the absolute ruler of everything, but when He came to earth, He didn't use His authority to boss everyone around and get what He wanted. Instead, He became a servant-leader. He used His position for others, and ultimately used it to create and sanctify His church. The leadership He calls us to as heads of our households is the same. We should live for our wives, not for ourselves.
- E. Next, we need to learn from Christ the willingness to **SACRIFICE** for our wives and our families.
1. Before we explore what this means, we need to look at just what sacrifice means in the Bible. Scripturally speaking, sacrifice is always offering something good to God. We don't sacrifice the sinful parts of our lives to Him; instead, our sacrifices occur when we take something that is rightfully ours, something that is good and appropriate for us to have, and give it to God instead. For example, if a man works hard for his employer, he is entitled to the salary he receives. However, he may well choose to take part of this money that belongs to him and sacrifice it to God instead.
 2. In Philippians 2:5-8, we see an example of Christ giving up something He was entitled to, not just for God, but also for the church. He surrendered everything He had, even His life, for others. When we consider our marriages, we need to have the same attitude toward our wives. Our culture is full of material status symbols, possessions that proclaim to the world that we've "made it." There's absolutely nothing at all wrong with us having those things, but there are times when we need to sacrifice them for the sake of our families. We need to think about our wives first, and not whether we can make the monthly payment. Let me give you an example: about ten years ago, I knew a Christian couple in their fifties. They both worked, but the wife hated working, and after decades of hard work, they were finally getting the point where she could afford to retire. Then, the husband went out and bought himself a huge new SUV. Guess what happened to the wife's retirement dreams? We can't do that. We need to be men who are willing to surrender our dreams to keep our family's dreams alive. We need to sacrifice.
- F. Finally, we need to be men who follow Christ in our **COMMITMENT**. There are a lot of Scriptures we could turn to in order to learn about the commitment of Jesus, but let's look at 2 Thessalonians 3:3. It tells us that Jesus is always there when we need Him. We also need to be there when our loved ones need us.
1. This is most basically true in the realm of sexual fidelity. When a man commits adultery, the biggest problem is not the mere act. It's that he's taken the love and devotion he promised his wife and given it to another woman instead. He has betrayed his lifelong companion by stealing from her simply because he wanted to. He has been unfaithful. Adultery is a disgraceful act, and any man who would stoop to such a thing is among the lowest of the low.
 2. However, it's also entirely possible for us to never cheat on our wives, yet fail in our commitment. Women need men who are always able and always willing to shoulder the burdens of leadership. We can and should take days off from our jobs, but we must never take days off from being a man of God.

Conclusion. All of this has been geared toward men, but God is always looking for everyone to serve Him.