

“The Covenantal Responsibilities of Husbands”  
(Ephesians 5:25-31)

Two weeks ago, we began looking at what the Bible has to say about marriage. Marriage was something that God instituted from the very beginning. After He had made all the animals, male and female, He made man and allowed him to go without a companion for a short while, so that Adam would be more aware of his need and of God’s mercy when he graciously fulfilled that need. But he didn’t have to wait for long. On the same day that God created Adam, after he had finished naming all of the animals, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon him. Then He took some of the substance of the man’s body, built it into a woman, and then brought her to the man. When Adam saw her, he said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen. 2:23). Here was someone now that was the same as him, quite literally, someone who would be able to meet his need of companionship, someone with whom he could spend the rest of his days, bound together in the covenant of marriage. This is all to say that marriage is a special blessing from the Lord. Solomon writes, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord” (Prov. 18:22). But we also need to realize at the same time, that marriage will only be a blessing if both parties, the husband and the wife, live up to their covenantal responsibilities. This is what we will want to begin to look at this evening.

In Ephesians 5, where our text is found, Paul first alerts us to the fact that if we are to glorify God, we must become imitators of Him, as children should do if they love their Father. We must also walk in love, the same kind of love with which Christ loved us. He writes, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (v. 1-2). This lays the foundation for what must take place in the marriage and family relationship, which he will deal with in just a few verses. If there is no love, there will be nothing to cement that marriage together. He also warns against those things which can quench this love: immorality, impurity, greed, filthiness, silly talk, and coarse jesting, all of which amounts to idolatry, because it usurps God’s rightful place as the Lord of our hearts. These things are not only serious enough to destroy our families, they will also exclude us from the kingdom of heaven, if not repented of. The child of God must be radically different from the world. Paul writes, “For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, walk as children of light” (v. 8). He tells us not to do the things we know God hates, but to learn and practice the things He likes (v. 10), even exposing the things that are evil (v. 11). We must walk in wisdom. Make the most of our time on earth, knowing that we live in an evil world (vv. 15-17). And we are not to let our hearts become captivated by the things of this world. Instead, they are to be filled with the Spirit of God and His holy influence. Otherwise, we will not be able to fulfill our marriage vows that we took both before God and man. Godliness must be at the foundation of all of our relationships. If it isn’t, we can’t expect them to last, especially our marriage covenants.

Having said this, Paul now moves on to address the parties within the family. First, he addresses the wives, then the husbands, then the children. I’m going to begin with the husbands this evening. I think it would be wise to begin with the responsibilities of the covenant head before we deal with the responsibilities of the wife. His faithfulness to his duties is first and foremost, for if these duties aren’t done or taken seriously, it makes it very difficult for the wife to do what she must do. However, we must always bear in mind that either of these roles will be impossible for us to fulfill, without the Lord’s strength and blessing, which comes only in the way of humble obedience. What I want us to see is that ***Husbands are to love their wives in the same way that Christ loved His church; or, which is the same thing, husbands are to love their wives in the same way that they love their own bodies.*** Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. But the church is Christ’s body, so the way that He loved the church is the same way in which He loves His body. Husbands, this means that you are to care for your wives as you care for your own bodies. You might think that this sounds easy, but I assure you, it isn’t.

Just how did Jesus love His church? Paul doesn’t tell us everything that Jesus did, but he does focus on one particular point: that Jesus gave Himself up for her. His love for her overrode any other consideration for Himself, so much so that He was willing to come into this world in her nature, live the life His Father called her to live but which she failed to do, and more importantly, take her place in God’s judgment, that He might one day receive her to Himself as His pure and spotless bride. Now He didn’t do these things only for His church. He also did this out of love for His Father. But this doesn’t mean that at the same time there wasn’t also a very real and powerful love for His people that was so strong that it motivated Him to do all that He needed to do in order to redeem them to Himself that He might have them as His prized possession forever.

I think that sometimes we tend to overlook how great of a sacrifice this was on the part of Christ. The One who was the eternally blessed God, was made in the likeness of sinful flesh and lived for about thirty three years

among a sinful people. The One who was the Creator of all things, became one of His creatures. The One who was infinite in every way, became finite. The One who had all power, became weak. He who had all knowledge, became ignorant. The Supreme Law-giver became subject to His own Law. The One who lives eternally, became subject to death. Jesus knew what the cost would be to redeem His bride to Himself. He knew that it was only through the shedding of His own blood that she would ever be cleansed from her sins. He knew that He had to face the wrath of God in her place, in order to rescue her from her just condemnation. This wasn't an easy thing to do. You know it wasn't. When Jesus, the night before His crucifixion, finally came face to face with the fiery furnace of God's wrath that He would go through for His people, He prayed three times that it might pass from Him. He labored in prayer to the point that even great drops of blood fell from His face in the garden as He wrestled with God for the strength to undergo what He knew He must do. And when He realized that His love for His Father and for His church would not be fulfilled unless He went through it, He meekly and courageously endured it, fixing His eyes solely on that prize that would be His. He endured the cross, despised the shame, and now has been seated at the right hand of God, waiting now for the gathering of His whole bride, which has been guaranteed because of His sufferings and death.

Now this is only part of what Christ has done in His love for His bride. It focuses mainly on His priestly work. As our priest, Christ not only laid down His life for us, but He continues to intercede for us. His prayers in heaven keep us in the grace of God. But Christ loves His bride in other ways as well. As our King, Christ rules over us and defends us. And as our prophet, He also teaches us the things we need to know for our salvation. All of these things are also included in what Paul means when he says that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

Now how are we as husbands to love our wives in this way?

First, we are to be like priests in our own households. This doesn't mean that like Christ we must literally lay down our lives for the salvation of our spouses. But it does mean, husband, that you are to nurture your wife and cherish her in the Lord. You are to nurture her as your own soul, because she is your flesh and bone. Yes, the Lord does call you to take care of her material needs and that of your whole family. You are to work to provide a home, food and clothing for her. Paul writes, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8). You are also to care for her health and her emotional well-being. But much more you are to care for her soul. You are to pray for her, constantly depending on Christ and the merits of His life and death for the efficacy of your prayers. You are to desire her holiness. You are to pray that she might become more and more like Christ. Your goal is to see her stand before the Lord spotless and blameless on that day. And as Christ was willing to lay down His life to insure that His bride might be saved, so you are to lay down your life for your spouse, doing whatever is necessary, making whatever sacrifice is necessary, in order to insure her spiritual health and well-being. You must love and nurture her as you would your own soul and body, for that is what she is.

As Christ loved His church as a prophet, so we are to love our wives in the same way. Christ as our prophet, reveals the will of God for our salvation, so must husbands be ready and willing to teach their wives the will of God for theirs. Paul says that husbands are to be the spiritual instructors of their wives. I don't know if you realized this, but as husbands, your responsibility in this area is even greater than that of the elders in Christ's church. Listen to what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, "Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, *let them ask their own husbands at home*; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church." Now if she is called in the Scripture to get her instruction from you at home, how much should this encourage you to learn the truth for yourself so that you will be able to answer her questions and to guide her in the right and holy way? The Lord calls you to lay up the treasures of His Word in your heart, so that you might be able to give godly and wise counsel when she needs it. You must be ready, as Paul tells Timothy, to speak the truth in season and out of season, that is, when she wants to hear it, and even when she doesn't, but needs to. The library which the Lord has blessed this church with is full of godly books. I would certainly encourage you to use them, as well as building your own library at home. But don't forget that these books are not to be substitutes for the Word of God, but only tools to help you learn it better.

And as Christ loved His church as King, so husbands are to love their wives. Christ as King rules over His church, protects and defends her, so must husbands do for their wives. Sadly, this often turns out to be the main area of tension between many couples. The reason is because of the curse upon man from the broken Covenant of Works. In Genesis 3:16, we read, "To the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'" Now we are not to understand this as saying that man and woman were created equal in authority but that the Fall brought her into subjection to the man. The Lord tells us that the man was originally created to be the head, but that the Fall

made this difficult for the woman. Now her desire is to usurp her husband's authority, which is why, as we will see next week, her subjection to her husband is her main responsibility in the covenant of marriage. Listen to what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:3, "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and *the man is the head of a woman*, and God is the head of Christ." He continues later in the chapter, "For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. Therefore the woman ought to have *a symbol of authority* on her head, because of the angels" (vv. 8-10). Woman was created for the man's sake, that he might have a companion throughout life to love and protect. She was not created to rule over him, but to submit to him. This is why Paul says that she ought to have a symbol of that authority on her head. Historically, this has been done by means of a headcovering which is worn in worship to reflect that authority. And as to the reason Paul gives, "because of the angels," we are perhaps to understand that when the angels saw Eve rebel against God by eating the forbidden fruit, they were offended because God's honor was violated. Now when they see a woman cast off that authority, they are reminded that Eve did the same thing.

But at the same time, this doesn't mean that the husband is to become some kind of tyrannical ruler over his wife. He is to love her. He is to be gentle with her and condescend to her weaknesses. Peter writes, "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" (1 Pet. 3:7). In the same way that the elders of the church are not to lord it over the church, but use their authority to protect and build up the church, so the husband is not to use his authority to lord it over his wife, but rather to defend and nurture her. He is not to victimize her, but to protect her, both from physical and spiritual assault. By the way, the fact that the husband is to protect his wife from physical assault is the very reason why we should pray that our denomination will adopt a statement against women in the military. Men are supposed to fight to protect women, especially their wives, not vice versa.

The last thing I will mention this evening is that we are to love our wives by being faithful to them. When Christ took His church for His bride, He took her alone for life. The same is also to be true of us. We are to keep ourselves for our wives and for them alone. Solomon writes in Proverbs 5:15-20, "Drink water from your own cistern, and fresh water from your own well. Should your springs be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be yours alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love. For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress, and embrace the bosom of a foreigner?" Christ will never leave His church for another woman, and neither should we husbands. Let us then make sure that our hearts and affections are always turned towards our own wives, and not someone else's.

Paul writes, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (v. 25). This is a tall order, but by God's grace it can be done. Let us then daily seek the Lord for His strength and mercy that we might glorify Him in the keeping of our covenant vows. Amen.