

The Husband's Love

A Refresher on the Family

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Well, as we come to God's word now for those of you that are visiting and there are many visitors with us, we are so glad that you're with us here today, I just want to let you know that we've been studying verse by verse through the book of Ephesians for well over a year now and we come now to Ephesians 5 as our text for this morning, specifically beginning in verse 25, and I mention that, I mention the context just briefly to help you know and understand that we're not doing a topical series on the family as we come here today as would be the case in other places perhaps, we're just simply going through God's word verse by verse and this is what we have come to today as we consider the biblical role of the husband. We started this last week. We're going to finish a wonderful passage this week, and let me read that passage, verses 25 through 33 of Ephesians 5 as we begin here this morning. Just by way of preface, you'll find that you cannot properly talk about marriage without immediately considering the entire nature of Christ and his love for the church. Those two things are wound tightly together in the thought of the Apostle Paul. Let's look at it together, Ephesians 5:25,

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body. 31 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. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

Now, as I said, we started this passage last week and I had intended to cover all nine of these verses just last week but as the Lord had it and as things moved in the course of the

message, we only got through verses 25 through 27 and so we're going to try to finish what we have here today. But even at that, it's going to seem like we're kind of rushing through some really key matters as we consider this text here this morning. As we consider the matter of marriage, you know, as we said last time, you're entering into a realm of great intimacy; you're entering into a realm where the closest of human relationships is laid open and brought to bear in light of the person of Christ and the inspired word of God, and I'm mindful of that as I preach that you need to be mindful that we're talking about intimate matters where all of us who are married feel that we fail at one degree or another, we have aspirations and so we approach these matters with hopefully with a heart of some tenderness and some sympathy and some compassion rather than simply to bang people over the head with what they are or are not doing. That is not the way that Paul deals with this at all.

As you consider marriage, as you consider the way that God approaches this subject, it is so vital for us to see that what is laid out as the pattern for marriage is not modern day marketing things about things that you can buy for one another but rather what is laid out is the eternal value of the Lord Jesus Christ laying down his life for the church and the way that the church responds to him. You can only think rightly about marriage if you are thinking about it first and foremost from the context of how Christ dealt with the church and what the significance of that is, and all of the modern shifts in our society over the past few years can only pervert that picture. That's the greatest travesty of it all, of homosexual marriage and those things, is that it distorts the picture of the purity of what Christ has done for the church and the example that is laid out there, but we won't worry about that. We've dealt with that in other perspectives.

What we want to consider here today is we want to see these four aspects of Christ's love for the church which provides an immediate parallel for the husband's love for his wife and realize that what we have here is a picture of Christ being presented to us first and foremost, and then drawing from that is a picture of what husbands are to be like with their wives. So, men, as you contemplate your marriage relationship or those of you who are looking forward in hopes that one day you will be married, what you're seeing here is not a list of do's and don'ts, you're seeing a person presented to you, one who laid down his life for you in order to redeem you from your sins; you have a person being presented to you as the model after which you would aspire. For those of you ladies, what you see as you go through this as well, is you see a picture of how Christ loved you and offered himself up for you and those of you that are married, you see a picture of the way a wife is to respond to the husband. So what we want to have focused in our mind going forward from this point now is just to recognize that preeminently we're seeing Christ in this passage and that has an incidental overflow on husbands as we hope to see now.

Well, what can we say about this? The first two points are review from last time. What can we say about this in husbands and the roles to their wives? We saw, first of all, that husbands are to give their wives a sacrificial love. Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her so that the church might be redeemed. Look at verse 25 with me. Again, this is all by way of review, where it says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." Christ's love for the church

manifested itself in a sacrificial love for the church to the point that he gave himself up; he lay down his life for the church at Calvary. Scripture says that that is what husbands are to do; you are to lay down your life for your wife; you are to put her needs ahead of your own rather than viewing her as a servant to you. Give her a sacrificial love. If you want to review this in more detail, I encourage you to pick up a CD on your way out because we can't linger over that which we've already said. Give her a sacrificial love.

Secondly, we saw last time that to be a husband, a Christian husband, is to give your wife a sanctifying love; to have a godly spiritual influence on her. Christ's goal in dying for the church wasn't simply to excuse the church from the punishment of hell. No, Christ's goal in dying for the church included the whole concept of purifying the church; of separating the church from its prior condition and bondage in sin to a life of holiness and purity, being set apart to live for his glory. That is the husband's pattern for his wife. Look at verse 26 where it says, "so that," Christ gave himself up for her, "so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless." And, beloved, even in that little statement there, we see usual notions about salvation completely upside down, that turns the way that the world thinks about earning favor with God completely on its head and shows how empty it is and how wrongheaded it is. You do not achieve salvation by things that you do for God. You do not come to a saving knowledge of God, you don't enter into heaven because of good things that you do. It is quite to the contrary. Jesus Christ did not love you because you were pure. He did not love you because you were holy. He did not love you because you were sinless or because you were so good. Quite to the contrary, Christ loved you when you were a sinner and while you were a sinner. He didn't love you because you were pure, he loved you to make you pure. That turns everything on its head. The idea that you could earn the favor of God with the works of your sinful hands is completely foreign to the theology of Scripture. Christ loved us to make us pure and as husbands, we draw from that pattern and realize that we must pay attention to the spiritual environment we set in our home. It is not enough, men, it is not enough at all for you to simply provide financially for your family. That is incidental. It is secondary to the reason that you exist as a husband. You exist as a husband to your wife, you exist as a father to your children, you exist to have a sanctifying influence on them; that your own walk with God would be such that it would permeate to have a sanctifying influence on those that are closest to you in your circle of relationships. So while you are pursuing your business and work responsibilities, keep in mind that that is incidental to the purpose of your life.

Now, with that said, with that little bit of review and as we kind of transition a little bit into new material here, here's what I want you to see. Again, can't emphasize this enough, can't say this often enough lest I be misunderstood for failure to state it plainly: what we're about to see and what we're about to continue considering is not a list of do's and don'ts for you to do as a husband. That's not the point here at all. It far transcends that because what Paul does is not give you a list of things to do which is where messages like this sadly tend to go, and just give you a list, a to-do manifesto for you to follow, as if you could just check off, "Okay, I took care of the flowers. I took care of the garbage. I

took care of all of those other things," and you check it off and somehow you have fulfilled your duty as a husband. Not true. Absolutely wrong. Completely wrongheaded to think about things in that way, and we'll see this right now. What you're being called to consider, what you're being called to contemplate in this passage, men, is not some kind of human activity. What Paul lays out for us is the unsearchable love and riches and grace of Christ as the power, the motivation, and the example for everything that you do. You are called to contemplate the eternal Son of God. You are called to look up. You are called to look back. You are called to look down, to look forward and in that great eternal realm of the love and sacrifice of Christ, find everything that sets the example for you as a believing husband. Not a list of do's and don'ts. That's why I'm not going to try to give you a list of six applications. That just trivializes it and takes it in completely the wrong direction. This passage is preeminently about Christ. It's preeminently about the love and the sacrifice of Christ for his people and I'm going to show you this. It will shock you how obvious this is right on the surface of the passage.

So what we're going to do here is we're going to hit the pause button on thinking about marriage for just a moment or two and we're going to see the love of Christ for his people in this passage because the point here is to be overwhelmed, to be saturated with Christ, first and foremost, and then flowing out of that is the incidental application to marriage. Oh, the application to marriage is important, it's crucial, it's foundational, but it's premised on something even greater and that's what you need to see here today. So, men, this is what helps you if you're prone to being just a little bit callous in your family, just a little bit indifferent to the needs of your wife, this is what shatters that indifference, that shatters those patterns of ill behavior and sets before you that which actually has a transforming power and impact upon you. Christ is the one that we see.

You know, what you see here in the first three verses of this passage, verses 25 to 27, Paul gives us in a remarkably brief, inspired way, a comprehensive overview of the love of Christ for his people. He gives us a wonderful synopsis of the eternal love that Christ has for his own, men and women alike. Look at verse 25 with me again. Let's take one more pass through this passage and see it again. "Husbands, love your wives," and then in the remaining verse and in the two verses that follow, he is completely focused on Christ. That's the way that it should be, that as soon as Christ is mentioned we just go into another realm and we kind of forget what we're talking about. Paul is talking about marriage. "Wives, submit to your husbands. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ. Oh, I've got to tell you about Christ now," and he goes off on this remarkable demonstration of Christ in the passage. What does he say? Look at it, "just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her," verse 27, "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory." What is he saying? Beloved, he has done nothing less than take you to eternity past, to eternity future and shown you the broad eternal unending scope of the love of Christ for his people. He says first of all there in verse 25, "Christ loved the church. Christ loved us with eternal love before time began."

Look back at Ephesians 1, you need to see this. Paul isn't saying these things for the first time and rather than just passing over, I wanted to stop and drill down just a little bit

more into this. Paul when he says, "Christ loved us," is talking about the eternal love that Christ had for his people even before time began. Look at chapter 1, verse 4, it says, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him," the eternal electing love of God for his people. But then go on and see this and keep it connected to what we are talking about here in chapter 5. He says, "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." Christ loved us, in other words, with an eternal love. He predestined us. Those who are in his people, he ordained, he predestined, he elected, he chose us with a certain result that we would belong to him in the end. And this was no mathematical accounting entry for him. This wasn't simply an arbitrary choice on his part. He did this, he loved us like that, he chose us out of the great unmeasurable love of his heart for his people. He so desired to bless us, he so wanted to be good to us that somehow it flowed out of things that did not even have a beginning. It flowed from the beginning of time. There was never a beginning of Christ's love for us. It was an eternal love that he poured out on his people and then creation began and God has been carrying out his redemptive purposes ever since.

You see, beloved, you and I who are Christians, we look at this and we realize that there has never been an instant in eternity where somehow Christ was not thinking about us in love. No, let me state that in a positive way: Christ has always, even before the beginning of time, looked on us with love; looked on us with favor, with grace, with the intention to bless us. That has always been his disposition toward us and we just saw it worked out in time in our salvation. He loved us, past tense. He loved us with an eternal love. In the context of the book of Ephesians, we see that he loved us before the foundation of the world. That's pretty impressive, isn't it? Not impressive in what I just said, what's impressive is that kind of eternal immeasurable love flowing from the Son of God on unworthy people like you and me. That's what's impressive.

He loved us and what does Paul go on to say? Look at verse 25. You can see the chronological progression: Christ loved the church and he gave himself up for her. 2,000 years ago at Calvary, our Lord Jesus Christ sealed his love for you with his blood, with his precious, redeeming, atoning blood. So before creation, time begins and the unfolding of the millennia leading up to the cross, Christ was ever pointing forward to that time, predestined before the foundation of the world. Scripture says he was the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world. There was a certain fulfillment of the purpose of his love. The climax of it, in one sense, came at the cross where he lay down his blood, lay down his life, shed it for you and me. We're talking about immeasurable love here. Infinite, unbounding, amazing, unconquerable love for his people. How do you measure that? How do you look into that? Well, you know, I don't know. One thing that you do for sure is that you approach it with a sense of holy reverence, a sense of gratitude and a sense of awe and wonder and grateful response that doesn't dispute with anything but just receives and embraces what Scripture says about these things.

He gave himself up for us. He loved us eternally and the crowning achievement of that, in one sense, was when he loved us enough to go clear to the cross and bear not only the physical punishment and torture on our behalf but to receive in his own body the penalty

that your sins deserved. To realize that somehow Christ, in a way that I won't pretend to be able to explain or understand, but that somehow in his sufferings on the cross, our Lord Jesus Christ felt and underwent the eternal punishment that should have been on you for your sins. He did it for you by name, Galatians 2:20, "He loved me and gave himself up for me." Christ endured the pains, he felt the consequences of eternal judgment that was on your sins. He absorbed it all and felt it all in his infinite being as God incarnate. He absorbed all of that somehow on the cross and why did he do it? Why did he do it? Because he loved you. Because he gave himself up for you. Because he willingly laid himself down. He said in John 10, "No one has taken it away from me but I lay it down on my own initiative." Beloved, could we possibly think high enough of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ? Could we possibly honor him enough for an eternal love that he set upon us before we had done anything to respond to him? Could we possibly think high enough of one? We're talking about a man here, we're talking about God incarnate, we're talking about our Savior, not some abstract theological concept. We're talking about Christ here and realizing that his love for us was so great, so profound, so deep, so eternal, that he willingly endured an eternal punishment on our behalf at Calvary.

Go back to Ephesians 5:25. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." As you go forward, you realize that verse 26 represents an advance of his saving purposes in our lives. Verse 26, you see the present purposes of Christ at work in our earthly existence now, "so that He might sanctify her," indicating the ongoing work that the Holy Spirit does in our hearts to sanctify us, to separate us progressively from sin and to make us more like the Lord Jesus Christ, realizing that Christ loved us with an eternal love before time began, that he loved us at the cross in an infinitely great way, and now we see what Paul is laying out in this passage is the present purposes of Christ in your salvation: to sanctify you, to purify you, to separate you more and more from your prior ways of sin that you might more perfectly reflect his image here on earth.

So he loved us with an eternal love. He loved us at the cross. He loves us as he sanctifies us now. And what's the outcome? Why is he doing all of this? What's the purpose of it all? Verse 27, you see it brought all the way into glory, all the way into the eternal riches which will be ours in Christ. Verse 27, "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless." There it is. The goal of all of this isn't simply what happened in the past, it isn't simply what's happening now, it's for the ultimate purpose that one day Christ would have a perfect bride with him in heaven throughout all the ages of eternity; that we would belong to him; that we would be part of a greater body that he has glorified, that he has perfected, that share and reflect in his glory and love and praise him and honor him forever at his throne. That's why we exist. That's why Christ loved us. The whole purpose of this little review here, verses 25 to 27, is to see the unfolding of the love of Christ, that from eternity past to eternity future, from the cross to our lives now, we are in the context of this great, surpassing, eternal love that defies human description that we only know because God has made it known and revealed it to us in his word. You would never guess at this. You would never guess that a holy God would love sinful people like that. You

would never as you simply go through your earthly existence lift your thoughts to that kind of lofty realm unless you had the holy Scriptures to aid you and help you in the process.

So you see, beloved, at the core of this passage on husbands and wives, Paul is really, in one sense, he's really teaching us about Christ and then drawing out applications for the way that it happens and what it means. Do you see it? Do you see the greatness of what's laid before us in this text? Eternal love before time began. Sacrificial love at the cross. Sanctifying love now. Glorifying love yet to come. We haven't begun to exhaust the depths of the love of Christ in our present earthly existence. He will be manifesting his love as one age of eternity unfolds into another into an infinite realm that is far beyond anything that we could ask or think. How great is the love of Christ? That's how great. It's so great that he gave himself so that you, sinful and defiant as you used to be, that you would share in those eternal riches with him forever and ever and ever. Amen.

How do you comprehend that? How do you get your mind around love like that? You really, in one sense, I guess you really don't. You realize that you're in the presence of an uncreated God, first of all, as a sinner, next of all, and you see these boundless realms of great mercy and kindness if you were to respond rightly would just simply bow before it, putting aside all of your prior dispositions and questions and human pride that kicks against eternal love and bow and with a heart overflowing with gratitude saying, "Oh, my Lord, thank you for this eternal love that you have given. Oh my God, it is so much greater than I could think. So greater than I could imagine. What can I say except to bow before you and just offer the totality of my being in worship to you knowing that even that is inadequate for the greatness of what you've done for me, for the greatness of the love that you've bestowed on my sinful divided heart." Let there never be any question about the love of God in light of Christ. Let there never be any questioning about why does God do this or why did I go through this hard time. No, no, no, no, no, no. When you see the eternal love of Christ on display, all of those things become inconsequential by comparison and you're so overwhelmed, so enraptured with the greatness of eternal love that everything else doesn't even matter by comparison to that. When you start to taste that, when you start to see that, you can say, "Oh, I'm starting to get the love of Christ now." As long as you want to inject, "But what about my earthly circumstances?" when eternal love is presented to you, you're not getting the point. You're not seeing it yet because when eternal love is presented to you, before time, at the cross, sanctifying now, glorification to come, when that is presented to you from Scripture, you're just brought to silent worship, a silent response that forgets about this life and is so focused on Christ and so full of magnifying him that everything else pales into insignificance. That's when you have a sense that, "Okay, I'm getting the love of Christ." Paul says that is the manner, that is what informs our perspective on marriage.

Look at verse 28 with me now. He gives the comparison. He says, "So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies." So, the comparison. As was Christ, so also husbands, you be like this. So we have seen in Christ a sacrificial love, a sanctifying love, and as we follow into Paul's example, Paul's flow of thought here, we move on to our third point. But, you know, I just have to say this: we are delighted to do that. We're

delighted to follow the text where the text goes but don't you find it just a little bit hard to, once your mind is in that realm of the eternal love of Christ, isn't it hard to think about moving on to think about anything else? Don't you just want to stay there and kind of luxuriate in the greatness of the love of Christ? To respond with warm affections? To confess your prior sins, your existing sins? To let go of your objections to eternal electing love? Because nothing compares to that. Nothing.

And yet if we were to follow the Apostle Paul's pattern, follow his train of thought which is our responsibility today, we say, "Okay, Paul, I get it. Where do we go to from here? How would you have us take this and apply it to our lives?" That's what he does here in verse 28 and for a third point, we said a sacrificial love, a sanctifying love, thirdly, we could say: what do husbands do in response? You give her a self-love. A self-love and "self" may be in air quotes there, but we'll see with this means. In light of the love of Christ for your soul, husband, how then should you respond in marriage? Verse 28, let's look at it with me. "So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself." Men, no one has to remind you to eat when you're hungry. No one has to remind you to sleep when you're tired. No one has to tell you to get a drink when you're thirsty. You know how to take care of your own body, in fact, you do it reflexively, you do it instinctively. You just naturally do what your body calls for you to do. What Paul is saying here is that in marriage, in light of the great love of Christ that he has shown to you, then your perspective on marriage is to reflexively and instinctively do what is necessary to care for your wife's needs; that it is so inbred in you that God has given you this woman, God has given you this spouse in order to manifest the nature of Christ to her and being informed by eternal love which gave itself up for you, you say, "Oh, I see now that I give myself up for my wife as well," whatever that means in your particular circumstance. We're not trying to define the specific point of application but rather to inform the mindset which will make it natural in your own situation without anyone having to tell you what to do. In marriage, you contemplate, you cultivate this natural reflex that what your wife needs you exist in order to meet.

Look at verses 29 and 30 along that way. "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, because we are members of His body." Notice a couple of the verbs here that Paul uses. He says to nourish her. In other words, help her develop into what God would have her to be. Seek her spiritual maturity and the use of the giftedness that God has given to her. Men, stating it negatively, don't stifle her. Don't dominate her and turn her into a whimpering mouse of someone. That's not why God made her and it's not what God gave you to her for. Nourish her. Develop her. Your goal should be to see her grow in Christ and to know her well enough to understand how to direct it to that end, to direct her life to that end, and to provide an environment, a stage in which that can happen. That's your perspective. "Well, I would take care of myself. I would take care of my own body. Ah, my wife. That's how I'm to deal with her. Not just in a physical way but in a spiritual way as well." You nourish her.

Paul uses another verb there, "to cherish." It has the idea of the warmth of body heat or of birds covering their young. What he's expressing here is the idea of a tender love and

care. You give her your affection. You talk with her. You're patient with her. You don't isolate her and just ignore her day after day after day after day. Well, you say, "Oh, I'm busy." Well, okay, maybe you need to change your life then because how could you possibly nourish someone and cherish someone with whom you never communicate, with whom you never spend time? That doesn't even make sense, does it? That's irrational and it's also disobedient.

Look at verse 29 with me again, "no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body." We understand that in Christ we have one who is with us; in Christ we have one who continually cares for our needs; in Christ we have one whose ear is always open to our prayer, who never neglects us. Somehow, men, this is a picture of the way that you are to care for your wife. It doesn't mean you never go on a business trip. It doesn't mean that you never are away or you go, you know, life happens. We get all of that. We're talking about where your heart is and what your priorities are and what is the pattern of life for you is the question.

And, you know, it's only, I think, that it's only when we keep in mind the eternal love of Christ that we can find the power and the motivation to overcome our previously established carnal habits and the bad patterns that you tend to fall into after 5 or 10 or 20 or 30 or 50 years of marriage. To realize that this is something transcendent that redefines life, if you haven't ever thought about it before, and to realize that you respond to this love of Christ in the context of the marriage that he has given to you or the relationship that's developing, you establish those things now and it's not enough to say, "Well, do you know what? I'm just not like that. I'm just not. I'm just not that kind of man." Well, what are you saying? What are you saying? How could you look at this passage and say, "Do you know what? I can't change. I know I'm uncommunicative and I know that I haven't expressed my love but that's just who I am. She needs to get over it. She needs to live with it." Well, no, that's not how God would see it at all. What God would see in this is that you need to repent. How could you live that way in response to eternal love which Scripture calls you to apply to your marriage? How could you do that? It doesn't make any sense, does it?

So going back to what we said last time, we have to view these things as, first of all, being our vertical response to a gracious loving Lord and not defining it first and foremost by whether you think your wife deserves this or, "You don't know the problems I've had in my marriage. You don't know how hard she is to live with." That's not even in this passage, friend. What's in this passage is the love of Christ and a call for you to respond in like kind. So it's not a matter of your established carnal patterns, it's a matter of coming humbly before Christ and saying, "Lord, how would you have me respond to your eternal love?" And as a married man, the answer comes in this passage. Here is how God would have you live it out, knowing that God has given you exactly this wife in exactly this context with exactly the history that you've developed over the years and realize, here's the stage, this is the raw material, now go and live it out. And the fact that Christ is at work in you, Christ is sanctifying you, Christ is the one who is with you,

gives you a sense of confidence that this is something that can change because it's not a call to self-effort, it is a call to respond to eternal love that we cherish.

So you give her sacrificial love, a sanctifying love, a self-love that is instinctive toward her needs and, finally, point 4, happy to share this with you because I know this is an issue often in married life in relationships, point 4: give her a separate love. Give her a separate love, a love that stands apart. Paul here reminds the Ephesians that in marriage, a new structure is in place and they must act accordingly.

Look at verses 31 and 32 for now. Paul quoting from Genesis 2, that's why in some of your Bibles it's in all caps, it's a quotation from the Old Testament, here Genesis 2. Verse 31, "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." You become one flesh; you're joined together; you cleave together; you're glued together. You see, and the whole point of marriage is that you would come apart from your prior parental relationships and establish a new unit, as it were. You would become an independent unit; the two would leave and become one flesh. There is a permanence and a unity that is referred to here. This includes a reference to the sexual union but it goes beyond that physical act to refer to a spiritual reality. There is a permanence, there is a unity and let me just put it all this way: the primary responsibility that a spouse has to his or her spouse, that a husband has to his wife, your primary responsibility is to your spouse. Your primary responsibility is to each other, not to your parents and not to your children. You must have that defining focus in mind. That doesn't mean that you ignore them, it doesn't mean that you neglect them, it doesn't mean that you abandon them in their need, but as a fundamental premise of life, it should be clear in your mind that my first priority in a human relationship belongs to my spouse. This is a picture of Christ and the church. Christ sanctified himself, set himself apart for the sake of the church and he calls the church out of the world to belong exclusively to him and if someone tried to drive a wedge between Christ and the church, it just couldn't happen because there is an eternal union that we have in Christ that cannot be violated.

Well, this gives us a picture of what marriage is supposed to be like. If a husband and wife are going along in their marriage and someone tries to drive a wedge between them, collectively they refuse the intrusion. The attitude is, "No, we are one." And in like manner, they work out problems between themselves without inviting their parents in in order to take sides. You know, I had a great set of in-laws given to me. My father-in-law went to heaven a number of years ago having served in pastoral ministry himself. But when Nancy and I got married, her parents reinforced this principle of leaving and cleaving to us. They said words to this effect, they said, "We will give you advice if you ask for it," but they also said, "Don't tell us if you have a problem." It was their way of calling us to leave and cleave; that you come out and you work through those things together; you work through those things as Christians with the sufficiency of the resources that you have in Christ. You leave and bring together a relationship that functions on its own. Now, you love and honor your parents even after you're married but it's in a different kind of way. They are no longer the primary authority in your earthly

lives. And parents should not interfere with your marriage. They should not poke around and try to take sides or exacerbate fights or conflict, I don't like the word "fights," really.

Look at verse 32, Paul says, "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church." There is a deep abiding union between Christ and the church. Paul has compared the relationship between the Lord and his people at various times to a body; one body with diverse members operating in unity. He has compared it to a building that has a foundation and yet a Scripture built upon it; an organic whole and yet there are identifiable individual parts. And now he compares it to marriage and says marriage is in the same way, there are two and yet there is one. So realizing that these kinds of things can be a pastoral issue, not being mindful of any particular issues as I say these things. Men and women, those of you that are contemplating marriage, you know, whether it's soon or down the road in the future you need to be mindful of this separate love that Christ calls us to, that the Bible calls us to.

Look at it there in verse 31 again, "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." If your parents have gotten too involved in your marriage, you know, you might want to think about how to deal with that so that your marriage is not compromised by parental influence. Those of you that are on the front end looking down into the future, you need to contemplate as you're contemplating a potential mate, you need to be mindful do his or her parents show a willingness, do they show a propensity that they will step back when the time comes and let us develop our own lives together. You need to be mindful of that. You need to examine patterns because controlling, manipulative parents can be a death blow to a successful marriage so just be mindful of that as you're contemplating your futures, those of you that are on the front end, those of you that are in the middle.

One of the things, and looking at it from another perspective, one of the things that I have appreciated about my own wife is the fact that she has never, any issues that we were ever dealing with never bled over into things that she said to other people. She has never undermined me to anyone even though I've given her plenty of occasion to do so. She has kept those things between us. We have dealt with things privately and moved forward and she has presented a sincere view that we are one. I'm grateful for that. So there shouldn't be running home to mom and dad to complain about problems, to complain about your spouse. That's not right. There needs to be a separate love that is present in marriage, a unity with diversity.

Now, as we come to the end here, verse 33, Paul breaks off the comparison to Christ and the church and now summarizes everything that he has been saying in verse 33. This is kind of a summary; it's a capstone. It brings what started in verse 21, arguably, full circle. Remember verse 21? Paul said, gave a general command to all of the church, "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." Then he started to apply it in marriage and he said, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. Husbands," verse 25, "love your wives." And so he started with this principle of submission and he's brought it around, he's talked to the wives, he's talked to the husband, he's emphasized how Christ is at the center of all of this and now he's bringing it back to complete it and to bring it full circle.

He says, "I've been speaking with reference to Christ and the church," verse 33 he breaks it off and he says, "Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband." And so he has brought it full circle. He said, "I've explained everything, now let me give you my summary. Wives, respect your husbands. Husbands, love your wives," and in this way informed by the ineffable example of our Lord Jesus Christ, empowered by his endless love for his people, in this manner, beloved, we move forward and express God's design for marriage and as we do, we reflect on a greater reality: the eternal love that Christ has for his church.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the eternal love of our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you that there was never a time where our salvation was in doubt because Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. Our eternity is sure, it is secure, because he loves us and would never allow anyone to pluck us out of his hand. O Lord Jesus, could we ever magnify you enough? Could we ever think you enough? Could we ever shout your praises loud enough so that it would fully compensate, that we had given a full recompense to you for what you have done? Not a chance. Eternity, our Lord, won't be long enough for us to express the undying gratitude and devotion of our hearts to you. Thank you for your sacrificial love. Thank you for your sanctifying love for us. Thank you that you loved us more than life itself and laid your life down voluntarily. Thank you that you have set us apart from this evil, wicked world, and you will be with us to the end and yet the end in terms of death will only be the beginning of the great eternal glory that you secured for us out of amazing love. How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me? Let it be, O God, that as we move forward now in life that the dominating wonderful thought of your eternal love would inform everything that we do and that somehow, O God, you would take that and apply it and help us to work it out in the realm of marriage whether that marriage is now or whether it's future in life to some of us here. Bless and help us, O God, as only you can do in accordance with your great eternal love. Help us to live this out in the realm that you have given to us in this time of life. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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