Opening Words

You don't have to go home and die for your wife. Go home and live for her, serve her, cherish her, nourish her. Die to yourself in small ways. Say no to yourself in small ways and say yes to her.

185 Eph The Faith … in the Family 4 – Husbands

There is nothing like the power of an example to spur us to live for Christ. Today, as we continue talking about putting our faith into practice in our homes, I want us to focus on the example of Christ. Paul gives a tall order to us men. He tells us to love our wives as Christ loved the Church. Christ showed his love in the clearest way when he laid down his life for our sins. But the cross was not the only expression of his love. He didn't start loving us at the cross. That was the highest expression of love, but we must realize that his love began long before that.

First, he loved us before the foundation of the world. Think of that, before time began Christ knew us, thought of us, and loved us. He knew when we would arrive on earth and he was determined to show us his love when we did arrive. But before anything happened, and knowing fully that we would turn away from God, he still loved us.

Second, his love caused him to act. Even though he lived in glory with his Father in the form of God, he chose to humble himself to become like us. He took on our humanity so that he could die for us. It's like he was signing his own death warrant. He couldn't die if he remained in glory in the form of God. He knew he would have to become one of us, and so, he took the step of humbling himself by becoming a man. Becoming a man, what we call the incarnation, was a step of love and he knew where it would lead – to death for us!

I am reminded of many stories I have heard through the years of missionaries who have taken assignments knowing that they would die. Some of the first missionaries to Africa travelled with coffins, knowing they would most likely never return home. I read of two Moravian missionaries who sold themselves into slavery so that they might preach the Gospel among the slave population of the West Indies and knowing they would die as slaves. I heard the story of a man who chose to live among lepers and minister to them knowing that he would probably contract the disease and die.

These are stories I remember. I am sure there are hundreds more, thousands more, of people who have willingly taken a path that led to death, and they did it because of the example of Christ who emptied himself of his outward glory and took on the form of man that he might die for us.

During his ministry Christ loved us. This is the reason why sinners flocked to him. They knew they were sinners and they knew Jesus did not condone their sin, yet they also knew that Jesus was offering a fresh start and was bringing them back into his family. His disciples knew that he loved them. He washed their feet and in his Gospel, John said that Jesus loved his own to the end.

And then there was the end, when he humbled himself even further and went to the cross to take our sin upon himself. The greatest expression of that love was when he hung on the cross for us, crying out in anguish, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" and paid the penalty for my sins.

He rose three days later and gathered his disciples, forgave them for abandoning him in the time of his greatest need and directed them to join him in his greatest mission to reach the nations of the world. He loves us even now.

Paul says, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. Love her that much. Look to Christ who loved sinners and when you see how Christ loved sinners, then love your wife." Is your wife a sinner? Of course! Love her.

Now, I don't think that many of you who hear my voice are going to have to die, literally, for your wife. You may. Some have. Some do. But Paul is giving us this supreme example of love and telling us to follow it with our lives. You don't have to go home and die for your wife. Go home and live for her, serve her, cherish her, nourish her. Die to yourself in small ways. Say no to yourself in small ways and say yes to her. If you do that enough, she will notice that you are following the example of Christ and it will bless your marriage.

Notice that Christ did this with a goal in mind. Listen to the passage again.

> 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.

His goal was to present the church to himself in all her glory, holy and blameless. The goal was not to die. The goal was to make the Church glorious, and we must have the same goal with our wives. Again, I am not asking you to go home and die. I am asking you to go home and make her beautiful inside and out by loving her with a sacrificial love.

Paul uses six action words and phrases in this passage to describe this love. Look at them with me. He **loved** the church. He **gave himself up** for her. His goal was to **sanctify** her. He **cleansed** the church by **washing** her with the word and he did this to **present** the church to himself. Love, giving oneself up, sanctifying, cleansing, washing, presenting.

Let me speak about these six action words and phrases. The first two, loving the church and giving himself up, refer to his going to the cross. The fourth and fifth, cleansing the church and washing her with the word refer to his act of declaring us righteous by grace through faith. We know this because when Paul said that Christ washed the Church with the word, the Greek text is *hrema*, which refers to a spoken word. *Hrema* refers to the act of speaking, and Paul is emphasizing that Christ cleansed us, washed us judicially by speaking his word of justification over us which he could do because of his death that paid for our sins. It's as if he stood over us and said, "You are now clean in my sight. Your guilt is gone. The record against you has been wiped clean. There is no condemnation upon you. You are now righteous in the record books of heaven. I declare it so."

This act of cleansing and washing us by his declaration of our righteous standing with God is what opened the door for God's sanctifying work in our life. This is the third phrase in the passage, that *he might sanctify her*. Sanctification, in many places in the New Testament, refers to the daily work by God to make us in practice what we are in position. We are legally righteous before him. We need to become practically righteous. We are righteous in the record books of heaven. We need to become righteous in the writings of our heart. His declaration of our justification before his Father opened the door so that God could work among us with power to change us and make us more like Christ, to make us holy, to make us blameless, to take away all the spots and stains on our garments and to smooth out all the wrinkles in our lives. That's sanctification and the goal toward which sanctification looks is glorification.

Christ is doing all this for us with the goal of presenting us to himself in this flawless way. That's the final phrase. Years ago, a celebrity married another celebrity. After the ceremony, he and his wife walked outside the church where cameramen were gathered in great numbers to catch pictures from every angle and I noticed how the groom stood to the side and reached out his arm to point everyone to his beautiful bride so that they would take her picture. When I saw that, I thought of this verse in Ephesians 5:27 where it says that Christ's goal is to present the Church to Himself, and really, to the whole universe. It is as if Christ will reach out his arms and say, "Everyone, look at my bride, look at how beautiful she is. Look at how holy she is. Look at how blameless she is. There is no spot, no wrinkle, or anything like that. She is perfect. She is flawless, and she is mine."

That's the goal of his love. Paul, in getting us to think about that says, "Husbands, love your wives in this way. Love your wives with this goal in mind – to make her beautiful on the inside and out."

What a great and glorious picture these words provide – loving, giving oneself up, sanctifying, cleansing, washing, and presenting.

But then, in his apostolic wisdom, Paul comes down from these lofty, heavenly visions of the future glory of the Church and gives some very practical ways to love our not-yet-glorified wives. Listen to verses 28-29.

> 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,

You can't get any more practical than that. Husbands, here is how to love your wife the way Christ loved the Church, love her the way you love your body. Do you like to make sure you get enough rest? Make sure your wife does also. Do you have some favorite foods you like to eat? What are your wife's favorite foods? Do you like to go to the gym and work out to stay in shape? Make sure you give your wife time to do the same. Think of the ways you take care of your body and then make sure that you are providing the same comfort for her. Nourish her as you nourish yourself. Cherish her just as you cherish yourself.

When we do these things, we will be following the example of Christ for Paul tells us in verse 29 that this is what Christ does for the Church. He is loving the church. He is nourishing the church. He is cherishing the church. Husbands, let's ask God to give us grace to love our wives in this way.