Opening Words

Headship isn't about control but is about care. It is about our taking responsibility to minister to our wives rather than ruling over them and asserting ourselves.

184 Eph The Faith in the Family 3 – Husbands

Now it's the men's turn! In our previous message, we looked at Paul's instruction to wives to subject themselves to their own husbands and to do so as if they were married to Jesus himself! Paul said, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands *as to the Lord*.

We saw that the best way to approach this passage is to look at the biblical framework that women and men are equal, that both are made in the image of God, and that the command to be subject is not an order to slavery but is about a proper order within the boundaries of God-given roles so that the family can accomplish what God intended it to accomplish. We also contrasted it with the sayings found in many cultures and religious traditions that are degrading to women. And thus, we are grateful for Paul's wise and balanced words.

Let's turn now to Paul's exhortation to husbands which is packed with life-changing truth. Let me read to you Ephesians 5:25-33.

> 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.

The first four words alone were enough to turn the ancient world of family ideas upside down. Wives were not for beating. They were for loving, and when I say that I am not just talking about sexual love. Wives were not property. They were equally valuable people. They were not to be the objects of our lust. They were to be the objects of our sacrificial love. Husbands love your wives.

Now the ancient Stoics talked about the need for husbands to love their wives but they only used the word, phileo, a good word, as it means a warm, friendship type of love which is priceless in a marriage. But Paul uses a different word. He uses the word, agape, which means a love of complete commitment. Husbands, love your wives with a total and complete commitment.

And then Paul describes what agape love looks like by speaking about the greatest love story in the world – the love of Christ for the church when he laid down his life for her. That's how men are to love their wives – as Christ loved the church. Nothing cheap here. This type of love is far more than warm sentimentality. This is love that is so passionate it will sacrifice for the other.

The Bible frequently depicts the relationship of God and his people as a husband/wife relationship. Listen to these beautiful words from Isaiah 54:5-8:

> "For your husband is your Maker,
> Whose name is the LORD of hosts;
> And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel,
> Who is called the God of all the earth.
> 6 "For the LORD has called you,
> Like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
> Even like a wife of *one's* youth when she is rejected,"
> Says your God.
> 7 "For a brief moment I forsook you,
> But with great compassion I will gather you.
> 8 "In an outburst of anger
> I hid My face from you for a moment,
> But with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you,"
> Says the LORD your Redeemer.

In Mark 2, Jesus spoke of himself as the bridegroom and the people with whom he was dining as the bride. In Revelation 19, when Jesus comes again, his people are invited to come to the wedding supper. And here in Ephesians 5, Paul draws from this long-standing tradition describing God as husband and his people as wife to urge husbands to love their wives and not to treat them as an object or a possession.

Paul speaks about love in three ways. Men are to love their wives sacrificially as he said in verse 25, "husbands, love your wife as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for the church," and of course we know that this "giving up" refers to his death on the cross. Second, husbands are called to love their wives specifically. Three times Paul says for husbands to love their *own* wives – twice in verse 28 and once in 33. This is like Paul telling the wives to submit to their *own* husbands. Don't submit to another husband. Don't fantasize about an ideal marriage with another man. Get on with the specific work with your own husband and in the same way, Paul says for men to love their own wives but he has a 3-1 ratio. He tells it to wives once and to husbands three times. Maybe that is because men have three times as much tendency to let their minds and eyes wander and to fantasize about the ideal wife. Get on with the specific work of loving your own wife.

Third, Paul tells men to love their wives specially. He tells men to love their wives as their own bodies. We all take care of our physical needs. The other day my wife and I went hiking and rock climbing with some friends – four hours' worth – and then we had a two-hour drive home. After dinner guess what I did, I drew a steaming hot bath and soaked my tired muscles. I was taking care of my body. In the same way, husbands love your wives in these kinds of special ways that she likes.

Just as you like special things done to you and you do special things for yourself, do special things for her. Love her sacrificially, specifically, and specially.

As we look at this passage it is also interesting to note that when Paul speaks to husbands he does not use the word authority. He does call husbands, "the head" but that is in the section to the wives where he is reminding them to submit to their husband as to Christ. But in the section he addresses to husbands, he doesn't use the word head or the word authority. He says, "husbands, love your wives." Six times in verses 25-33 Paul uses the word, love. That should tell us something.

I think it would be appropriate at this moment to mention the excellent resource by Gary Chapman called *The Five Love Languages*. This little book has sold millions of copies and understandably so because Chapman shows that when we seek to love one another we need to learn to express love in a way that is meaningful for the other person. Chapman says these five love languages are words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. And the point of it is that different people process and value love in different ways. For my wife, she likes quality time and physical touch such as holding hands just to show that I know she is there. I like acts of service. We need to learn how to love in a way that is most meaningful for the other person. I highly recommend that you read this book if you have not done so already.

Finally, today, I want to point out that because of this emphasis on love, we learn that headship isn't about control but is about care. It is about our taking responsibility to minister to our wives rather than ruling over them and asserting ourselves.

And isn't this the spirit of Christ? Remember when I talked about submission and that the spirit of Christ was not to grumble but to obey his Father and submit to his will with a glad heart? I shared that when wives submit to husbands, that is a great testimony to the world. In the same way, a husband's headship must manifest the spirit of Christ for the head is not a dictator. A head is not a commander-in-chief barking out orders. A head is one who is ensuring that the ones under his authority are cared for and nurtured. For this we must go back to the section for wives. Listen to verse 23 again, "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body." Notice that Christ, the head of the church, is the Savior of the Body, not the dominator of the Body. In the same way, we husbands are to be "the Savior," so to speak of our wives. We are to be a blessing to them. We are to nurture them. We are to cherish them.

I can't help but think of Christ, on the night he was betrayed, how he put a towel around his waist and went around the table and washed the feet of his disciples. That was shocking to them. He, the Lord of glory, became a servant to these men. And then he said, "If I, the Lord and Teacher, have done these things to you, you should do them to one another." John's Gospel, which I am quoting in this story, tells us that the reason he did this was because he loved his disciples. Because he loved them he served them. That was the expression of authority toward them.

Jesus told his disciples that the greatest was the servant of all, the greatest was the one who was least, the greatest was the one who was youngest. And then he capped it off by going to the cross

and dying for the sins of the disciples, dying for your sins and mine, dying for the Church because he loved the Church. And so, Paul tells husbands to love their wives in this way.

We will continue talking about this in our next message. For now, let me say again, if every Christian man in the world would live this way and if the Church would teach the world to embrace Christ and live this way, there would be a revolution in the world and many of the injustices we see against women would be a thing of the past. May God grant us this grace to live this way and be a light to the world.