

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

A Husband's Responsibility Ephesians 5:25-29

Intro: We are in the middle of Paul's discussion on the subject of submission. This theme began in v²¹ as the last of 3 specific characteristics Spirit-filled believers will manifest in their Christian walk: joy, thankfulness and submission. As the Spirit is to fill every believer, so every believer will engage in submission, in some form or another, to one another in the fear of God. Again, this is an ordered submission that will be reflected in different lives in different ways and situations depending on the God-given role each are called to fulfill within the Body of Christ. Submission is often seen in a negative light but it needed be for the Christian. It is a product of the Spirit's work in our lives and as such, it should be entered into confidently and obediently so that more fruit of the Spirit will become evident in us.

Paul first stop in his discussion of submission is in the home, specifically with marriage. This is not accidental, nor is it incidental. Paul deals with marriage first because marriage, of all human institutions, is the most important. Last time, we discussed the Genesis account of the first marriage ceremony ever conducted. Remember, the one thing in all creation that was not good in God's judgment was the aloneness of man, without woman. God's creation of Eve was the completion and perfection of His creative acts. Marriage was the great good that topped creation. And yet, marriage is seen in such a negative light by a large portion of the population, even by many who are married. It's been said that "Marriage is an ideal, that turns into an ordeal and eventually, you start looking for a new deal."

What's the problem? Part of the problem is that we live in a sinful world where nothing is as perfect as we would like it to be and marriage by its very nature opens us up to deep hurts. We're vulnerable in marriage, and we're therefore disappointed and hurt by its failures much worse than hurts experienced in other relationships. The chief problem is that we've forgotten God's guidelines for marriage. So we suffer marriage breakdowns just as we would suffer the breakdown of our automobiles if we disregarded the manufacturer's instructions for their maintenance.

The place to start in any discussion of marriage is with the fact that marriage

is God's idea and that it's a good idea. It's a good idea, because it comes from God who never had a bad idea. It follows, then, that marriage is good—regardless of what we make of it—and that failed marriages, which we see all around us and which seem to be increasing, are the result of our failures rather than God's. Our real failure is that we don't follow God's directions for marriage. This is what Paul is concerned with in Ephesians, as he first instructs the wife and then the husband. Wives are called to submit to their husbands and husbands are called to love their wives.

25 – If submit is Paul's key word for Spirit-filled Christian wives then love is his key word for Spirit-filled Christian husbands. Just because the wife is to submit to her husband does not give the husband a right to act like a petty tyrant around the house. In fact, he's not to be a tyrant at all. If the wife's standard in the marriage is the very high standard of her love for and submission to Jesus Christ, the man's standard is to be even higher. He's to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. No woman will have much trouble submitting to a man who loves like that. No good woman will struggle hard against a man who is willing to die for her.

According to **II Tim 1:7**, God has given us the spirit of power – but also of love. Power, in the believer's life, is always to be exercised in love. So, while the husband has the role of being the head, this is not a position of naked power where the man assumes certain rights for himself but then tramples on his wife's feelings, sitting in the home like a dictator. No husband is entitled to say that he is the head of the wife unless he loves his wife. The "reign" of a Spirit-filled Christian husband is to be a reign and rule of love; it's a leadership of love. Wives are called to submit and the husband's responsibility, in return, is not to ensure their submission, of abuse it or dominate her. He is called to love.

The English language can be very expressive in some ways and be very poor in others. We probably have 6 different ways to describe the color pink yet, we only have one word for something as important as love. A person can say they love hot-fudge sundaes and they love their spouse. Both uses would be correct but you would expect a higher form of love to be shown to the spouse. The Greek language of Paul's day had at least 4 different words for love: Eros— refers to erotic love; love driven by desire. Storge— refers to family love (relatives); love driven by blood.

Phileo- refers to brotherly friendship and affection; love driven by common

interests. Each word describes instinctive love; love that comes spontaneously from the heart. Each speaks about love that is felt.

Agape is the 4th word for love and it's the word Paul uses here. Agape describes a different kind of love. It's a love that's more of a decision than of a spontaneous feeling of the heart. It's as much a matter of the mind as it is the heart because it chooses to love the undeserving. Some attempt to define agape as God's love but that's not entirely accurate as men are also said to agape darkness (sin) and the world ([Jn 3:19](#); [1 Jn 2:15](#)). Agape love is a sacrificial, giving, absorbing love. The word has little to do with emotion; it has more to do with self-denial for the sake of others.

This doesn't mean Paul is discounting the other kinds of love. On the contrary, he assumes eros (desire) and phileo (fondness) are present in the marriage relationship and Christians shouldn't act as if these things don't matter because they do. Paul's point is to address a higher kind of love. Agape loves without changing; it's a self-giving love that gives without expecting repayment. It's a love so great it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing; it loves even when rejected. [Agape](#) gives and loves because it wants to; it gives because it loves.

We can read this verse and think that Paul is merely saying, "Husbands, be kind to your wives." Or "Husbands, be nice to your wives." No doubt, for many marriages, this would be a huge improvement. But that isn't what Paul wrote at all. What Paul is really saying is, "Husbands, continually decide to practice self-denial for the sake of your wife."

Clearly, this is a high standard. It's no wonder why agape is considered to be God's love as He is the only one able to love this way 100% of the time and yet, it's this same sacrificial love that's intended by Paul here.

Understandably, in setting such a high bar for love, it's no surprise that this agape-love is never found in any other household codes outside the NT. In fact, Paul's expectation of a husband sacrificing himself for his wife would've turned contemporary social convention completely upside down. In the Greco-Roman culture of the day, it was the wife who was expected to sacrifice herself for her husband.

loved - Once again, we see that the parallel of the husband-wife relationship to Christ and the church is the primary focus. Christ's attitude towards the church is a pattern for the Christian husband's love for his wife. This teaches

us that a loveless marriage doesn't please God and doesn't fulfill His purpose. Christ loved each of us before we were part of His body; agape love is given to the undeserving. It's a love that is given first, a love that may be rejected, but still loves. I realize there are plenty of Christian marriages out there in trouble and a husband might be wondering how he could ever love his wife again. He can do so by following the Lord's example. Jesus loves the Church, not because there is loveliness in the Church, but in order to make her lovely.

Paul's actually teaching 2 things at once here. He's teaching about the nature of the husband-wife relationship and the relationship between Christ and His church. Both illustrate important principles about the other. Jesus loves His church with a special love. Yes, He loves the world and died for the world; but just as a husband can have a general love for everyone, he must also have a special love for his bride. Jesus also loves His church unselfishly. He doesn't love her for what she has or even for what she is. No, Jesus loves His church for what He's going to gloriously make her as the object of His love. He loves her not for what He gets from her but for what He is able to bless her with. Jesus has a constant, enduring, hearty love for His people, His church. This is how husbands are to love their wives.

Do husbands love like that? Do men even understand that this is what true love is? Not many! Yet this is their standard, and they're responsible for knowing it and acting upon it. In [1 Peter 3:7](#), Peter tells husbands that if they do not love like this, God won't even listen to their prayers. Why should God listen to a man who does not even know how to treat his wife properly?

gave – Jesus' action toward the church is also a pattern for a husband's love. It's to be a self-sacrificing love. What was involved in Christ's sacrifice? The best statement on this point is seen in [Phil 2:5-8](#). Through all of this, the focus of Jesus was on the church, the individuals that would become the church. It was for the church that He did what He did, not for Himself. This aspect of Christ's sacrifice is especially needful for husbands who view headship and submission from a worldly standpoint rather than a biblical one. Some husbands think that since God has made them head of the home and the wife is obligated to submit to them that they don't need to be humble, lay down their lives and sacrifice for the benefit of their wives. This comes from not understanding the difference between worldly

headship and godly headship.

Worldly headship says “I am your head, so you take your orders from me and must do whatever I want.” Godly headship says, “I am your head, so I must care for you and serve you.” Worldly submission says, “You must submit, so here are the things I want you to do for me.” Godly submission says, “You must submit to me, so I’m accountable before God for you. I must care for you and serve you.” Of course, this is not the height of romantic love as the world knows and promotes it. This isn’t love based on looks; image or anything displayed in media or entertained in the general public’s consciousness. This is love expressed through sacrifice and yet, even this can be misconstrued.

The majority of the text focuses on Christ’s loving care for His church, yet the parallel to husbands appears again in 28 and 33. In each case, Paul appeals to husbands to love their wives as they love themselves. This is because Christ’s love is also toward His own body, the church. If Christ loves His own body then husbands should love their own bodies – their wives. Still, it’s obvious that the sacrificial love of the husband for the wife is not meant to remove their own worth or dignity. It would be unconscionable that sacrificial love might be abused to denigrate or deny the inherent value of the one who offers it!

Sadly, that’s how this verse could be applied to husbands – their own dignity, respect or health is to be given up for their wives. “Jesus entered our world and died there!” This would be an over-application of Paul’s call to husbands. The husband’s well-being is a self-evident good since he is to love his wife as himself. Jesus showed the same self-evident appropriateness of self-love when He commanded the disciples to love their neighbors as themselves (Mt 22:39). This doesn’t mean that husbands shouldn’t give their lives for their wives or put to death their own desires in order to serve their wives. It simply means that their sacrificial love shouldn’t be abused or manipulated, just as the wife’s submission shouldn’t be abused.

So, the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church, giving himself up for her. Realistically, most of us will never have a chance to put our love for our wife to that great and ultimate test, but we do have countless lesser ways to show our love on a daily basis. One wife rightly told her husband,

“Dear, I know that you are willing to die for me; you have told me that many times. But while you are waiting to die, could you just fill in some of the time helping me dry the dishes?”

26 – The goal of Christ’s self-giving sacrifice was to make the church holy. The word is *hagios*, and it’s translated “sanctify” as well as “make holy.” A holy person (saint) is one who is set apart wholly for God. This is what Jesus desires of His church: that she might be set apart wholly for Himself. Christ has made His church holy by having cleansed her already. When Jesus gave Himself for the church on the cross, His death provided cleansing from every stain sin makes. Since the work of Jesus on the cross comes to us through the Word of God and the preaching of that Word, it can be said that we are washed of water by the word. There is something cleansing about being under the teaching of God’s Word.

In this same way, husbands are to love their wives, winning them for themselves. In addition to this, since we must think of this in terms of the wives’ relationships to God as well, it is winning them for devotion to Jesus. Obviously, a husband can’t spiritually cleanse his wife the same way Jesus cleanses the church. Yet, a husband can take an active, caring interest in his wife’s spiritual health. As the priest of the home, it is one of his responsibilities to help keep his wife clean before the Lord. In other words, husbands are to have their wives’ spiritual development in view. Whether we know it or not; whether we accept it or not, God will hold husbands responsible for the spiritual growth and maturing of their wives as well as their children (**6:4**).

27 – The purpose of making the church holy, of cleansing her, is so that Christ may present her gloriously to Himself. This means Jesus intends to share His future with His bride. Since the church is not fit for Christ by its very nature, He is resolved to make her so by His grace! Jesus can’t be in communion with sin; thus, it must be purged away. Perfect holiness is absolutely necessary in one who is to be the bride of Christ. His purpose is to accomplish that in the church, to make her to be His spouse both appropriately and eternally.

Defects have a negative affect on holiness. That’s why priests were prevented from serving in the temple if they had a skin disease, or imperfect animals were rejected from being sacrificed. In the same way, the church

must be without spot or blemish in order to be holy and blameless. But the cleansing of the church isn't done solely to remove spot or blemish but also that it might be found in splendor, radiant and glorious as other translations put it.

The idea isn't that the bride is in this state before the wedding day, but on the wedding day. We're to be made this pure in heaven when we are joined to Jesus Christ in a way far beyond everything we have experience before! The Holy Spirit seems to exhaust all human language to describe this purity – without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. When Jesus presents His bride to Himself, in front of all the principalities and powers with all the multitudes of ranks of celestial being looking on at this marvelous sight, and scrutinizing and examining her, there will not be a single blemish of spot to be found on her. The most careful examination won't be able to detect the slightest speck of sin or unworthiness in her! This is the end product of all Christ's work for His church and what a glorious day that will be!

In the same way ought a Christian husband to love his wife. A husband should never use his headship to crush or stifle his wife, or frustrate her from being herself. A self-sacrificing love for her will lead him to an exactly opposite path. He will give himself up for her, in order that she may develop her full potential under God and so become more completely herself. Any husband would be a better husband if he could begin to see his wife as being on the way to becoming that dazzling creature, which she will surely be in heaven in her resurrected body. He will also become better if he would realize that under God he is responsible for playing a part in her ultimate transformation.

28 – Previously, Paul gave 3 reasons for a Christian wife's submission to her husband. In addressing Christian husbands, Paul also gives 3 reasons to love their wives: 1) because this is what true, agape love is (25); 2) because the relationship between the husband and wife is patterned after that of Christ and His church (25-29); 3) here: because you are one with her just as Christ is one with the church.

Paul's not saying husband should love their wives in the same way they love their bodies. Again, that would be an improvement in many cases but that's not what he means. The meaning is husbands ought to love their wives because they are their own bodies. Just as Eve was a part of Adam,

taken from his own body, so the wife is to her husband because she's part of him. Paul intends for the husband to see that he cannot detach himself from his wife any more than he can detach himself from his own body. Christian husbands won't know this instinctively, they must be taught it and the Bible teaches this everywhere. He must understand that he and his wife are not 2, they are one.

Simply put, when you love your wife as God intends and desires, you benefit yourself. The flip side of that truism is that when you neglect your wife, you neglect yourself and it will come back to hurt you. We all know what it's like to neglect something: the roof leak won't fix itself; the check engine light comes on for a good reason and if you choose to ignore it, it will come back to bite you at the worst possible moment. This is even more true of your wife because she's part of you. Only a fool neglects his own broken arm or infected wound yet there are many husbands who hurt or neglect their wives and they will suffer for it. On a purely practical level, the entirety of the husband's thinking must include his wife also. He must never think of himself in isolation or detachment from the marriage relationship.

29 – Any man in his right mind is going to take care of his own flesh, his physical body; even if it's just in the sense of feeding, clothing and caring for his own body. Eat a lot of fat, greasy food and you'll turn into a fat, greasy dude. Forget to take a jacket on a cold, frosty morning and it's going to hurt. Fail to maintain even a minimal dental hygiene and it's going to hurt in your mouth and your wallet. If you don't take care of your body, you will suffer for it. In the same way, once we accept the Biblical fact of this unity of oneness in marriage, if we are in our right minds, we will nourish and cherish our wives because they are part of us.

God created marriage in order that, among other things, a Christian man and a Christian woman might find the deepest of all possible fulfillments in each other and be happy. I sure there are Christians who will acknowledge this, but who are so discouraged by their own personal failures that they've concluded that there's now no hope for their marriage. But, in truth, for the Christian it is never the case that any given relationship is hopeless. If we would simply do what the Bible says we are to do and do it regularly and to the best of our ability, being empowered by the Holy Spirit as well, then marriages will be restored because they will be following God's directions for marriage.

Loving husbands produce happy wives and as we all know – happy wife = happy life! 😊