

## INTRODUCTION

Having last time set the context for the instructions given here to families I want this week to carry on those instructions. Last time we mainly looked at wives who are to submit to their husbands. She is to do this with the same attitude that she shows when submitting to her Lord. In fact submitting to her husband is a clear indication that the Christian wife is in fact submitting to her Lord.

We also looked at the fact that the reason for the wife's submission has nothing to do with men being superior to women but it is in fact the role that God has assigned to her within the family relationship. Likewise the husband is given the role of headship within the marriage relationship; this role is modelled after the role of Christ who is head of his church. The husband is ultimately responsible for his family.

He is accountable to God for his home life and this task of headship is made much easier when the wife of the home submits to her husband in the same way that the church submits to its head the Lord Jesus Christ. Now that is where we left it last time.

### 1. THE ROLE OF THE HUSBAND AS HEAD OF THE HOME

If the word that characterises the wife's role is 'submission' so the word that characterises the husband's role is 'love.' Now this is unusual I would suggest to you. For if God has made the Husband head over the home and if the wife's role is to submit then you would think the word that would be used to describe the husband's role would be something like 'authority' or 'rule' or even 'leadership.'

Now it is true that the role of headship must involve authority and it must involve a ruling function and it must involve leadership but the way that all of these are exercised is through love. Without love being the husband's number one role then he could easily become a tyrant who abuses his family. True biblical headship in the home is about love. The husband exercises his headship, his leadership through the sphere of true biblical love.

This is how Jesus exercises his headship within the church. Christ does rule the church, he has absolute and total authority within the church, he is the leader of the church but he expresses all of these functions through his true sacrificial love, as we will see in the minute. So Husbands do not use your headship as an excuse for exercising your authority or for having your own way or for showing your male chauvinism. No! Headship is about love.

Now we need to realise that what God is saying here through the apostle Paul was very radical in Paul's day. There were many cultures in Paul's day that thought headship meant authority and superiority and this is why women in general were treated appallingly. The Stoic teachers of Paul's day taught that husbands should love their wives but the word they used for love was a brotherly love the love that you would have for your friends and family.

But Paul goes beyond this and says that the Love that husbands must display is 'agape' love, which is a self-sacrificing love. It is a love that desires the other person's welfare and well being more than your own. The love of a husband must not be self-centred or even a general love that we might have for mankind. But it is to be uniquely Christian it is to be a giving love a sacrificing love a love that seeks the welfare of your wife before your own welfare.

Paul uses two pictures to illustrate the type of love a husband should show to his wife.

a) A Husband must love his wife as Christ loved the church (vs. 25-27) – Throughout the Old Testament the gracious covenant that God made with his people Israel was many times referred to as a marriage covenant (Isaiah 54:5-8 and Jeremiah 31:31-32). In the New Testament Jesus took over this teaching and boldly referred to himself as the bridegroom (Mark 2:18-20). Paul now enlarges on that image here and also in 2 Corinthians 11:1-3 while in Revelation we are permitted glimpses of the glorified church “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” and of the coming marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9 and 21:2, 9).

The aspect of this marriage relationship that Paul chooses to highlight here is the sacrificial steadfastness of the heavenly bridegroom’s covenant love for his bride, the church. It is this that husbands are to imitate within the marriage relationship. Christ is thoroughly committed to His bride the church and Paul uses five verbs here to emphasize this commitment. “He loved her,” “gave himself up for her,” “to make her holy,” “having cleansed her,” so that “he might present her to himself” (vs. 26-27).

This statement is so comprehensive that some scholars think that it might even have been an early Christian hymn. But one thing is clear these five statements trace Christ’s care for the church from a past to a future eternity. This is an eternal commitment. That is Paul’s point just as Christ is eternally committed to his church so husbands with that same love are to be committed to their wives. The first statement is the key statement “Christ loved the church” and all the other statements that are made here show how that love for the church is demonstrated.

So if as husbands we ask how are we to love our wives? What does it mean to love them? It must mean the same as it meant for Christ to love the church. Christ love is seen in giving himself up for the church and of course the reference is clearly to the cross. Christ gave his life for his Bride the church he came into our sin sick world and willingly went to the cross in order to save and secure His bride for himself.

So husbands what does it mean to love our wives? Well it is not just a romantic love although there is romance in love but it is a giving love. We give ourselves for her, we put her interest before ours, we give of ourselves to her and we do so without counting the cost. Now of course we need the balance from elsewhere in Scripture our love for our wives should never replace our love for the Lord.

There can be a great danger of that happening but one thing is sure we cannot love the Lord without loving our wives with this sort of love. Christ’s love was such that he was prepared to die for his church. Are we husbands prepared to die for our wives, is our love for them that great. Have you demonstrated your love for your wife this past week? Has it been a self-giving love a willing to die love? Of course we can never have this love by ourselves this is a God given love, only Christian people can display this sort of love for it is given to us by God himself (Romans 5:5). This love comes to us by his grace and we need to seek him daily that he may pour into our hearts this sort of love so that we can pour out our hearts in love to our wives. But even so husbands we can easily become so selfish in our relationship with our wives.

We can be tempted to think that as heads of our home somehow or other our wives should just submit to us without us ever thinking that our part in this relationship is sacrificial love. Now it is true that wives ought to submit in everything (v 24) even when we are not the husbands we should be. Everything of course must be qualified to mean things that are right and wholesome and not sinful things. But husbands we need to be more thoughtful towards our wives we need to be more loving towards them.

I read a story this week about a husband who was in love with his wife. He said to her “dear you know that I love I would die for you.” The wife replied “yes dear I know but until you are asked to do so would you mind living for me and doing some dishes.” The point is it’s so easy to say we

love our wives and even say I will die for you but unless we are showing that in daily practical living then it is all meaningless. Jesus didn't just say, "I loved the church" he demonstrated it. So husbands let us be men who show our love in practical everyday ways so that we will be rightfully exercising our headship in the home.

But Christ's love had a purpose he died for his church in order to make her holy, by cleansing her so that he could present her to himself as the perfect spotless Bride that God intended her to be. This is a very important point Christ loved the church and gave himself for her in order that she would be all that God intended her to be. In God's eternal plan he sent Jesus to die and save the church and he sanctifies the church now in order that one day she will be all that God intended her to be in his original plan.

Now if we can apply this to the earthly husband and wife relationship then husbands our love for our wives should be self-giving so that our wives will be all that God intends her to be. We come back to what I said last time about the development of your wife. As head of your home are you seeing to it that your wife is developing and becoming all that God intends her to be. Do we encourage the development of her gifts? Do we make sure that she has sufficient stimulus within her life?

This is particularly important if she is at home all day or is looking after the children. It's important that when we come home from our work that she is provided with that stimulating conversation and that we provide whatever it is she needs so that she can be stimulated in her mind. Of course husbands we are responsible for seeing our wives become all that God intends them to be spiritually as well. Husbands take the lead in making sure that there are family devotions within the home. Find out how your wife's quiet times are going, is she having one? Are they dry? Discuss with her spiritual matters and issues.

Make sure that she gets out to church and Bible studies if at all possible in order that she may spiritually grow. Wives let me say a few words to you. Don't get upset if your husband asks you about your bible reading. It's not that he does not trust you to do one but he is simply exercising his love for you by making sure that spiritually you are becoming all that God wants you to be. So husbands we need God's grace for this task it is simply too overwhelming for us.

Left to ourselves we would go back to our old self centred way but we need daily grace to see to it that we love our lives in such a way that we are taking responsibility for her well being. That we are seeking under God to see her develop in every way that is possible in order that she might become all that God wants her to be as a woman and a wife and all that God intends her to be. This is a process just as the church is not **now** all that God intends the church to be so our wives will not be that woman that God wants her to be. That's why the Holy Spirit works in the church to sanctify her and that is why we need the same Holy Spirit in our hearts husbands. That is why we need the Holy Spirit in the lives of our wives so that we both will become all that God wants and intends us to be as a married couple. Our marriages are not perfect, that's why we must keep praying for them and keep working at them with the help of the Holy Spirit so that they will become all that God intends them to be.

Our headship men should never seek to stifle or even crush our dear wives, our headship should never hinder our wives from being themselves but instead we must give ourselves for our wives so that she will develop to her fullest potential under God.

**b) Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies** – After exploring the lofty heights of Christ love for his church we are now back down to earth. We may not be able to grasp the greatness of Christ's love for his church for it truly does surpass knowledge and we might therefore find it difficult to apply such a high standard to our love for our wives.

But we all know from everyday experience how we love ourselves and therefore Paul now uses our love of self to highlight the type of love we should have for our wives. We never have to tell people to love themselves for we all know that we naturally love ourselves and this is seen in the way that we treat ourselves. After all says Paul have you ever met anyone who hates his own body? No he loves it to the extent that he feeds and cares for it. (v29). We have all come to church this morning and I can tell that you have all done a little work on yourself before you came. You washed and dressed and combed your hair and cleaned your teeth and had breakfast.

You will go home from church for Sunday Lunch. You will rest your bodies at some stage today and so on. It is our natural instinct to feed and care for our bodies, it is right to do so. Therefore says Paul love your wife as you love your own body, feed her and take care of her. This clearly involves providing for her physical needs. We work in order to provide for our wives and as long as that is possible we are to do that.

But we are to feed her mentally and spiritually as well. Husbands make sure she is reading good books watching good programmes and generally having her mind and soul fed. We are to care for her emotionally our wives have great emotional needs that we are to meet. We will hug and kiss them and be there for them when they need us. We will support them and encourage them and be strong for them and seek to motivate them. It is our duty husbands to make sure that all your wife's needs are met.

To do so is an expression of our love for her. Now we need to be clear husbands. It is not the church's or the State's task to care for your wife but it is our duty our responsibility to make sure that our wives are cared for. Now wives is it hard to submit to such a man who loves you with a self sacrificing love and cares for you and feeds you physically mentally and spiritually?

## 2. TO NEGLECT OUR WIFE IS TO NEGLECT OURSELVES (vs. 31-32)

When two people get married they become one flesh. Therefore to fail to care for our wives is actually to fail to care for ourselves. The husband and wife are truly inseparable this is why God hates divorce we are putting asunder what God has rightly joined together. When we leave our Parents home and marry our wives we become one flesh (v 31). We make a clean break from our Parents we now have responsibilities to our wife because we have become one.

This is of course consummated in sexual union for husbands and wives are considered by God to be one. Husbands we are clearly united to our wives in the same way that the church is united to Jesus Christ. Now this is clearly the closest human relationship that anyone can know we talk about being soul mates well husbands and wives are soul mates for we are one. So husbands how can we fail to care for our wives? How can we so often be neglectful of her needs and how can we fail to encourage her to reach her potential. We can and do because we forget that we are one we often fail to live as one and very often married couples are simply two people living together doing their own thing. Such a thing should not be and Christians particularly ought to be setting the example of showing how two people live as one flesh. The marriage model is of course Christ and his church we are united to him; we Christian are in him.

It's no wonder that Paul says that this is a mystery. There is a mystery here (v 32), and we must remember that the word 'mystery' in the bible means things once hidden but now revealed. God has showed us the closeness of the married relationship by showing us the relationship between Christ and His church. How many of us could work it out that two become one through marriage.

Of course there are things that we do not fully understand but that intimate union is God ordained and therefore as husbands and wives the best way to demonstrate to our world the union and value of marriage is to fulfil our God given roles in marriage. Wives submit; husbands love and care our wives.

That's why Paul summarises it here in verse 33. He brings us back to the heart of the matter. Husbands love your wives as we love ourselves and wives respect your husband or fear them for it is the same Greek word as verse 21.

Problems in marriages can be very complicated but we can probably boil all the problems down to these two truths. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church. If we husbands did that would our wives have cause to complain? Wives submit to your husbands. Would husbands be able to grumble that their wife wears the trousers in his home if wives submitted to their husbands?

It is possible that there is a marriage that is going through the rocky seas at present. Well here is the answer, love your wife with a selfless and sacrificial love and wives submit to your husbands just as you would submit to Christ.

For those here who have strong marriages continue to keep them strong by loving your wives and by submitting to your husbands? We cannot do that in our own strength we do not have the power to do so.

We are naturally self-centred and therefore we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered by him to love and submit like this. But whether we are married or not we are all to submit to one another and we are to do so out of reverence for Christ who is the head of his Church (v 21).