

March 3, 2013

Proverbs 31:28-31 / I Cor. 7:1-7 / Col. 3:19 / Ephesians 5:25-27  
 The Submission of Husbands to Meeting The Needs of Their Wives -  
 Intentional, Purposeful, Sacrificial Love

Every time I have ever preached on these verses I have pointed out that of the two partners in the marriage relationship, God places the greatest responsibility and the most difficult task upon the shoulders of the husband.

The wife has the more passive role. She is simply called to **"submit"** (that is, to stop fighting and resisting) the loving oversight, servant leadership (or headship) of her husband. While the husband (on the other hand) is called to **"love his wife just as Christ loved the church and lay down his life for her."**

In fact, the picture I have often used for this is one of a husband seeking to "lift up" his wife. In that sense, picture what would happen if as he tries to lift her up, she fights and squirms and resists him. It would frustrate him and end up hurting her -- which describes the state of many marriages to a tee.

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Likewise, it is important to point out that Paul takes only 4 verses to give the wives one instruction and summarize her role in submitting to the need of her husband to act as the God-ordained head of the home and respect him as he carries out that role.

But he takes 9 verses to give the husbands one instruction. Over twice as many verses to summarize his role in meeting the need of his wife to be loved and cared for and cherished as the one who has become one with him.

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He goes into far greater detail in relation to the husband. In fact, in this one paragraph Paul tells husbands four times (once in v. 25, twice in v. 28, and once again in v. 33) in four different ways: "Love your wives, love your wives, love your wives, love you wives."

Do you think there was something he wanted husbands to do?! You think?!

And what I'd like to do today is look at: **1.)** How the husband submits to his wife's need to be loved. **2.)** What that love looks like. And **3.)** Why it is that Paul repeats it four times in four different ways!

And I'm going to start with the last, **FIRST**, and consider why it is that Paul had to tell all husbands (and all potential husbands) to love their wives -- four times in four different ways -- because I do believe there is a reason for that. (Beyond what was said in ABH about how men in general, due to their singular focus, need to be told things more than once!)

That may have something to do with it, but I believe it goes much deeper than that. In fact, I believe it has to do with the state of marriage in Paul's day. Because when you look at the state of Roman marriage in that day, you realize that men (in general) did not love their wives. In fact, it wasn't expected that they would love their wives -- at least not in any way that even faintly approaches the way that Paul speaks of here.

And here, to summarize the sad state of marriage in Paul's day, Barclay simply quotes the Greek philosopher Demosthenes, who wrote: ***"We have prostitutes,"*** he said, ***"for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines (that is, live in mistresses brought into the home to sleep with) for the sake of daily co-habitation; we have wives for the purpose of having our legitimate children and as a faithful guardian for all our household affairs."***

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Or to put it in contemporary terms: The wife in Greek culture / was a baby machine / who also served as a maid and a nanny. / In fact, they often lived in a house in back of the main house or a sectioned off apartment while the husband lived in the main section with his concubines or mistresses.

Likewise, as Barclay goes on to tell us: ***"She never took part in public life; never appeared on the streets alone; never even appeared at meals [which she usually made] or at social occasions; and had her own apartment where none but the husband might enter in."*** And all this was done, as another Greek philosopher Xenophon tells us, so that, ***"she might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible, and ask as little as possible."***

Which lead Barclay to state: ***"companionship and fellowship in marriage was impossible."*** Why? Because in Greek marriage she wasn't there to be loved and cherished and cared for / she was there to do a job -- to bear his kids, do the housework, and raise the children.

Even Socrates, once asked: ***"Is there anyone to whom you entrust more serious matters than to your wife, yet is there anyone to whom you talk to less."***

You think you have it bad ladies?? Imagine where you might be right now if Paul and the teachings of Christianity had never come on the scene?

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This is why I get so tired of hearing people, who in their ignorance of history, paint Paul as if he were this "horrible male chauvinist pig" who somehow invented, or taught, the oppression of women! Because if they simply read their history books, they would realize the debt of gratitude they owe the apostle Paul as the one who made great strides to liberate women from the oppression they endured before Christianity came on the scene!

For in these verses Paul liberates wives from the slavery of being locked away in some backroom, or apartment, with the kids, while her husband went out and hired prostitutes for his erotic pleasure had mistresses living in the main part of the house for companionship, or to serve like an escort service to social gatherings, or to sleep in their beds with them each night -- except, of course, when he decided it was time to have another child and invited the wife into his bed)!

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It was into THAT environment and BECAUSE of that culturally ingrained view of marriage, that Paul (I believe) had to repeat his message to husbands four times, in four different ways, when he told them to love their wives! Because you can just hear these Greek husbands, raised in such a culture, saying: *"What? Love our WIVES? Why would we do that? After all, they're our wives! Paul, you just don't get our culture."*

Yet that's precisely what he did get! He understood their culture perfectly, and considered such treatment of wives as sinful, which is why he sought to change it! And thus he tells them four times: Love your wives, love your wives, love your wives, love your wives.

Wives aren't simply "things" to boss around and use! They're not life-long, live-in employees that you attain through marriage! They're not maids and nanny's you lock away in another part of the house to take care of the household chores

and the kids while you get all your erotic pleasure and romantic and relational companionship from prostitutes and with live-in mistresses! They're people you love.

Thus, Barclay is right when he says: ***"It is the simple fact of history that no one in the world (with the single exception of children, as we will see) owes more to Christ (and we could add, to Paul's teaching here) than women. It is impossible,"*** as he rightly points out, ***"to exaggerate the cleansing effect that Christianity had on ordinary everyday home life in the ancient world."***

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Then **SECONDLY**, let's consider what that love is supposed to look like. And for that (as with so many things in the Christian faith) all we need to do is look to Christ and His cross. For Paul tells husbands, in v. 25, that they are to, ***"love their wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her."*** That is, Christ gave up His life, that she (the Church) might have life. And the husband is to do the same for his wife (showing us where the understanding of "head" as "source" comes from).

And let me add this, gentlemen, from the start: If you are not willing to "give up" your life for your wife, you are not ready to be married. In fact, if you could never bring yourself to do that, you should never get married! Because that's not only what loving one's wife looks like, it's what biblical headship looks like!

It's **NOT** (as so often implied) barking out orders where your wife is supposed to somehow jump to attention, salute you and then get busy doing what you command her to do! That would be regressing to the pre-Christian, Greco-Roman understanding of marriage where the wife was seen like an employee -- the very mindset Paul is trying to do away with!

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**And listen:** The type of love Paul calls husbands to show to their wives in this passage, is "agape." Not eros. Not sexual or romantic love, or love that involves intense feelings for her.

In v. 25 Paul says: ***"Agapate your wives..."*** And "agape" is: Pure, selfless, sacrificial, look for nothing in return type love. A love that's expressed primarily in one's attitudes and actions.

And here, 1 Cor. 13:4-8 gives us the most complete description of agape. And notice that throughout the entire passage there are no feelings mentioned at all. Because "feelings" belong primarily to the other loves: To **phileo** (which is fond affection), **storge** (which is the affectionate bond between a parent and child), and to **eros** (which is romantic or sexual or erotic love).

Not so with agape. Agape is expressed through our attitudes and our actions not our feelings or emotions. Agape is the love that does what is right simply because it's the right thing to do! In fact, AT TIMES agape means going against what one feels in order to love as one should -- as in loving one's enemies, or being kind to those who spitefully use us.

**"Agape,"** says Paul, ***"is patient and kind."*** In fact (as I've mentioned before), the KJV translates it: ***"agape suffers long and is kind."*** That is, it, "suffers long and is kind to the one who makes it suffer" (which for the married can sometimes include your spouse).

**"Agape does not envy,"** says Paul, ***"nor does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking."*** That is, unlike the other three loves, agape gives without wanting anything back in return for its love. It's the only love that seeks to get no type of payback -- even if that "payback" is nothing more than a simple, "thank you."

And again, says Paul, ***"Agape is not easily angered."*** And notice it doesn't say, "never angered" -- though it does take a lot to get agape ticked off! And, "it keeps no record of wrongs. / That is, husbands are not to keep a mental list of all the times their wife has messed up.

***"Agape does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Agape never fails."*** And because agape comes from God, it reflects characteristics found in God, like commitment, honor and nobility. Reliability, faithfulness, truthfulness and integrity. Patience, devotion, selflessness and generosity. Sacrifice, and keeping one's promises, and doing the just or right thing simply because it's the just, right or noble thing to do!

It isn't spawned by emotions, it's spawned by a love for what's good and right and true.

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And what's the ultimate expression of agape? What did Jesus say? It's that a person would be willing to **"lay down his life for his friends."** And for you husbands that means: If the time should ever arise where your wife's life is in danger -- are to love them so much that you would give up your life for her.

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Some of you may have seen the news clip a few months back on MSNBC: where a man named Don (an ex-football player in Joplin, Missouri) threw his wife of six years into a bathtub, covering her with his own body when a tornado suddenly tore through their neighborhood -- only to receive a puncture wound in his back and die in the process of saving her life.

Or maybe you saw the story of the store manager in Miami Gardens, FL, who sacrificed his life to save his wife when a gunman opened up and started shooting during a robbery. He was hit with several shots as he shielded his wife -- saying to his cousin as he was bleeding out: *"See you in heaven. Take care of my two children."*

No thought of payback. No thought of anything except protecting their wives. It was selfless sacrifice. That's "agape." **"Husbands, love your wives JUST AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH and laid down HIS LIFE for HER."**

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Then **THIRD**, Paul tells husbands that we are to love our wives (just as Jesus loved the church) -- "to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of water through the Word, so that He might present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle, or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

That is, agape, or the love of Jesus, is both intentional and purposeful. It's purposeful because it's done with a very specific aim in mind, and intentional because we can't assume that arriving at that goal will simply happen all by itself, automatically!

This is a big weakness in men, and probably another reason Paul takes the time to hammer it home four times! Because once married (once the conquest has been finalized on the wedding day) men can tend to become much more

lazy in their efforts to love. Not in the sexual sense, but in the sense of purposefully and intentionally investing in the relationship.

It's almost as if for men, a switch goes off after the honeymoon is over! And from that point on (or shortly thereafter) they begin to pour all that purposefulness and intentionality into their jobs or careers and just sort of let the relationship happen, or take its course. They "switch to autopilot," without giving it the effort they did when they were trying to win her love in the first place.

Yet, contrary to that, Paul tells us that Christ not only loved the church by laying down His life for her, but continues to love the Church, feeding it and caring for it (v. 29). Why? He wants to "make her holy... and present her to Himself as a radiant (or glorious) church, without stain or blemish or any other imperfection."

And the love of a husband must be similar in nature. It must -- with ongoing intentionality and purpose -- seek to bring out the radiance or the glory or the inner beauty of our wives.

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For instance, the Prov. 31 woman is an excellent example of this. For there, her husband doesn't keep her barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen (like the Greeks did). But rather, he has full confidence in her (v. 11) and encourages her to be industrious (vv. 13-15) and buy some real estate (v. 16) and out of her own earnings, plant a vineyard (v. 16b) and even start a business where she makes garments to sell at the market (v. 24) as well as supplying sashes to the local merchants (v. 24b) -- all things she could not have done in those days unless her husband had supported her and encouraged her and freed her up to do them.

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And what does his support and love do for her? V. 25? She becomes a woman, **"clothed with strength and dignity who can laugh at the days to come."**

That is, she becomes radiant and able face the future with confidence! A mother, a merchant, a manager, a farmer and a business owner! And, this, says the writer of this chapter (King Lemuel) is the ideal woman! She's worth far more than rubies!

In fact, as a side-note in honor of his mother (who was surely like this): I need to point out that Prov. 31 is one of the few passages of Scripture that was incontestably authored by a woman (King Lemuel's mother).

Verse 1 clearly points this out when it says: "***The sayings of King Lemuel -- an oracle his mother taught him.***" He simply shared the oracle she had written down.

And I can't move on from Prov. 31 without pointing out (as we also see in Ephesians): This husband (following what Paul says in v. 26) had, "***washed her with water through the word.***" That is, he had taught her the Scriptures, since as a Jewish woman, she would not know them otherwise.

And how do we know this? Because she has become, "***a woman who fears the Lord***" (v. 30) / and a woman whose, "***works (and godly character) have earned her praise at the city gates***"(v. 31). That is, in the place where, "***her husband...takes his seat among the elders of the land***" (v. 23).

And what's he doing there? Apparently he's bragging about how wonderful his wife is to all the other elders -- and they all agree!

THAT, my friends, is both purposeful and intentional love which aims at a specific outcome -- a godly woman, of inner beauty, who is the envy of all the other men! He doesn't keep her locked in the house like Greek husbands did. Rather, he releases her.

He gives her his blessing and encourages her as she ventures out to start her businesses. He praises her for all her efforts and accomplishments -- in her home, in commerce, and in the community. She's an example and the envy of all other women.

Then **LAST**, Paul adds, "***in this same way husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies, for he who loves his wife, loves himself.***" Or as I have paraphrased it at some weddings: "***The husband who loves his wife (with this same selfless, sacrificial, purposeful, intentional, encouraging agape love!) does himself a favor as well.***" In loving her, he loves and benefits himself.

And, of course, to grasp what Paul means here, one must understand the biblical concept of the two becoming one flesh in marriage. We must understand the mysterious oneness that God creates between a husband and wife through sexual union, and spiritual union, and shared values, and shared experiences, and so forth and so on. The principle Paul obviously has in mind and actually quotes in v. 31!

Since the wife has become one flesh with her husband through marriage, to love her, is, in the most real sense, to love himself. To care for her is to care for himself. To look out for her best interests, is to look out for his own best interests.

Because if she falters, it will bring him down, or if she gets lethargic and depressed (from a lack of love) he also will suffer the consequences -- because she and he have become "inseparably one."

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That's why Paul can say to husbands in v. 29: "***You feed and care for your own bodies, right?***" And what's the expected response? Of course you do! Then take care of your wife in the same way, says Paul, for if SHE becomes spiritually, emotionally or physically ill, YOU will suffer from HER lack of health (or your relationship's lack of health).

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**LISTEN GUYS**: Paul is telling you that if you don't take care of your wife, YOU will suffer the consequences! Though I do need to add for all you ladies: No husband can possibly meet all you needs. And I stress that, because if you mistakenly think he can, or try to make him do so, you will utterly destroy him or run him into the ground. Because no human being (no husband) has either the ability, nor the inner resources, to meet all his wife's needs.

The same is true for all you wives as well. And the sooner each one learns that, the more healthy our marriages will be.

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In fact, that's one of the reasons many marriages are "saved" or become healthier when the couple comes to the Lord. NOT because the Lord all of a sudden fixes all their problems and they no longer have any!

It's because they stop looking to their spouse to fill them up or be their Savior. As unbelievers they had no other option. But when they came to Christ, they instead began to look to Christ and the Holy Spirit to fill them up and meet all their needs -- and He can, out of His infinite and inexhaustible resources!

Now, of course, there are SOME NEEDS we husbands CAN meet (to a degree) -- and God calls us to do what we can to meet them. But there are many other needs that ONLY JESUS can meet. And in those cases the best way your husband can love you, or care for you, is by telling you that that he can't and then point you to Jesus as the only one who can supply what you need.

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So, husbands, did you get it? Love your wives, love your wives, love your wives, love your wives -- as Christ loved the Church, by giving His life for her. It's the hardest command in the whole Bible!

Love her agape: Selflessly, sacrificially, and with the purposeful intent of bringing out the beauty of her person (just as Christ does with the Church in order to "make her holy, glorious and radiant)!

Will you fail? Yes. You're human. But that's what forgiveness, and new beginnings, are all about -- and you'll need many!