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Sunday Evening Service
Series: Ephesians
Community Baptist Church
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HUSBANDS IN THE CHURCH
Ephesians 5:25-33

The story about how our first parents plunged the world into sin intrigues me. One part of that story especially generates a difficult question to answer in my mind. Apparently, this one simple statement generates a lot of questions in that commentators cannot agree about what happened. The question flows out of the statement, *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:6)*.

The question is this, "If Adam was standing right there beside Eve listening to Satan speak through the serpent tempting his wife, why didn't he step in to stop it?" That question is based on the assumption that generates all the disagreement. Does the statement require that Adam was actually standing there watching the whole of creation descend into sin? The phrase *who was with her* actually does not demand for that to be the case. For example, I can say "I was in school with so-and-so," which does not mean that he and I were together all the time. I was "there with him" in the general sense of time and location. So, too, Adam was indeed in the Garden of Eden with Eve. But that does not demand that he was present at the temptation.

On the other hand, it does not appear that a lot of time expired from the moment Eve yielded to temptation and Adam followed her example. Either way, whether Adam was present or just somewhere in the Garden, he failed his responsibility miserably. God had placed Adam in the Garden to *work it and keep it* (Genesis 2:15). That required Adam to carry out a responsibility toward the Garden.

Would he not also have a responsibility to care for and protect the "helper that was fitting for him," the "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh"?

Whatever God-ordained responsibility Adam was supposed to carry out regarding his wife, he dropped the ball. There is no indication that he defended her, that he protected her, that he instructed her. Granted all of that assumes he was elsewhere in the Garden at the time of the temptation. Things didn't get any better after sin entered the world. With the introduction of the sin problem, these most important relationships have suffered greatly, and most husbands have been dropping the ball ever since.

That is why it was necessary for God to inspire Paul to include instructions about a spiritually-effective relationship between husbands and wives in a letter about Church life. Again, the health of the Church is intrinsically tied to the health of the family. A healthy family must have godly-husband leadership. That looks very much like godly-Christ leadership in the Church. In fact, we should be very humbled that God has ordained that the husband's relationship with his wife looks just like Christ's relationship with His Bride the Church. That is a profound mystery. Let's dive into the mystery to see what we can learn.

The Standard (vv.25-27).

How is a husband supposed to love his wife? He is to follow the pattern of Christ's love. *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (v.25).*

The Savior loves His Church with a love that is superior to anything of human origin. Christ's love for the Church is *agapei* love. That is supreme love characterized by desiring the best for the recipient even if it requires sacrifice. That supreme love caused Christ to divest Himself of certain divine prerogatives to become one of us. It was that love that drove Him to live sin-free into His thirties. And ultimately, Christ's love for His Church caused Him to lay down His life to win her. That is the husband's standard of love.

It is a sacrificial kind of love. The Savior already sacrificed Himself for His Bride. The triune Godhead had already determined the extent of sacrifice that would be required to purchase the

Church's deliverance from the penalty and power of sin. In eternity, the members of the Church were identified by sovereign choice. Jesus knew exactly for whom He laid down His life. He submitted to murder for people like you and me. It was for us, His enemies, that He died. Jesus did not make the sacrifice because we are so likeable. In fact, it seems impossible to me that my Savior could like me. But because of amazing grace, He loves me. And *agapei* love motivated my Groom to already, actively make the sacrifice necessary for me to be His bride.

Second, the standard for us husbands is that Christ's love is a sanctifying work. He died *that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word (v.26).*

The Savior sacrificed in order to sanctify. Without the sacrifice being predetermined in eternity, sanctification is a non-issue. To sanctify is to make holy, to consecrate, to dedicate. Eternity determined beforehand that our Groom Jesus would set us apart for His own use, for His own glory. It was a predetermined fact, but it is an ongoing process until we are in His presence. Our continuing sanctification is not magical or an ethereal mystery, but is a practical, ongoing work every day.

How does Christ sanctify us? The Savior sanctifies with His Word. Christ sets aside everyone who is born again (the Church) for Himself, for His work, for His glory, at the moment of salvation. That would be equivalent to the husband taking his bride at the moment of marriage (when he says, "I do").

But after we have been taken by Christ into the Church (salvation), the setting-apart process continues. We are continually changing. We are continuing to grow up into Christ who is our head. We are continuing to become more like Him. Paul gave us that instruction in the previous chapter of this letter. *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (Ephesians 4:15).* We are being transformed into Christ's image. *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).* In the sanctifying process, we are getting to know our Creator (Bridegroom) better and better. *We have put on the new*

self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator (Colossians 3:10).

This change is effected through knowing and doing the Bible. The washing of the Word is God the Holy Spirit continually cleansing us from sin with the truth of the Bible. It is not magic, hocus-pocus, or easy. It is consistent, sometimes strenuous labor.

What is Christ's goal in this process of shaping us? *So that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (v.27).*

The Savior sanctifies us in order to remove the Church's blemishes. He desires to present us to Himself *without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (v.27b).* The work is necessary because we come into relationship with Christ tarnished by sin in our soul and flesh. At salvation Christ washes away our sins. But we still have an ugly, tarnished flesh that needs much work of transformation.

Ultimately, the Savior benefits Himself through our sanctification. He washes away our blemishes *so that he might present the church to himself in splendor (v.27a).* Sanctification removes the blemishes and makes us into a beautiful bride for our Groom Christ. What we picture as much labor and sometimes painful processes of sanctification is simply making us beautiful for Jesus.

The Application (vv.28-31).

The words, "in the same way" drive this standard of Christ's love into the husband's life. *In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies (v.28a).* In the same way that Christ loves the Church the husband is to love his wife. Again, it is a sacrificial love demonstrated *having already given self for her (v.25a).*

It is important to note at this point that the required standard is love, not "like." No wife is perfect, which means that some wives are difficult to like. All wives come with as many issues, problems, and defects as husbands do. There will certainly be times when the husband will not even like the way his wife talks, acts, responds, or even looks. But, remember Christ did not take us to be His bride

because we were so likeable. One of the most marvelous truths to me is that Christ chose to love me when I am not only unlovely, but unlovable and unlikeable. There is nothing in me that would make me attractive to Christ in any way. "Like" is a natural response based on something attractive or appealing. Love (in particular *agapei*) is a determination to do what is best for the recipient even if it requires sacrifice.

Therefore, husbands can be sure that loving their wives will require sacrifice. The question is not, "What sacrifice are you willing to make for your wife?" Christ was not willing to sacrifice for the Church. He already gave the ultimate sacrifice. So the question is, "What sacrifices are you making for your wife right now?" What are you not doing, what have you given up, what time or energy are you devoting to her for her good or benefit? And if you can boast about the particular sacrifices you are making, you don't love your wife – you love yourself (that's pride).

The next statement in the text suddenly hits the husband like a brick. I am of the opinion that the most difficult sacrifice for a husband to make for his wife is to sanctify her with the washing of the water of the Word. Christ's love, the standard for us husbands, is a sanctifying love. Therefore, the husband gives himself in sacrifice to his wife *that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word (v.26).*

How does a husband wash his wife with the Word? You have to read your Bible together and pray together. You must order your family according to what you read in the Bible. You must make your family decisions based on the truths you read about in the Bible. By this point, most of us are able to understand quite clearly why most "Christian" families are not becoming more like Christ.

The work of sanctifying is a very difficult sacrifice to make. It means that the husband will have to be self-disciplined and motivated to take the initiative. That is about where the train comes off the tracks. The husband must first be living in fellowship with Christ through His Word before he can hope to bring the wife along with him. Furthermore, it is a great sacrifice because, often while reading the Bible together, God will say stuff that exposes the husband's weaknesses. Yep! Sanctifying by washing with the Word is definitely a sacrifice driven by love for the wife.

This is also how the husband nourishes his wife because he cherishes her. No man hates his own body *but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church (v.29b)*. Nourish and cherish are two actions that demonstrate love and sanctification. To nourish generally means to provide food (a pretty necessary labor). To cherish is to take care of tenderly, to provide not only needs but desires. We nourish and cherish ourselves with ease. Nothing could be easier or at least more natural. Likewise husbands must work at making their wives more like Christ because they need it.

If husbands will follow Christ's pattern of sanctifying love, they will discover that it is also a satisfying love. Christ sanctifies *so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (v.27).*

The wording in this statement makes us realize that washing with the Word of God is more effective than spiritual botox. We are all familiar with the miracle drug called botox that makes wrinkles disappear like magic. The problem is that you have to keep going back to the doctor to get more shots. Wrinkles, spots, and blemishes are a natural, unavoidable part of aging.

And spiritual wrinkles, spots, and blemishes are just part of having a carnal nature. Washing with the Bible consistently, progressively removes those spots. We are constantly working toward the goal of sanctification Paul described to Christians in Rome. *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace . . . and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:11-14,18).*

The husband's goal is to help his wife become more like Christ (*holy and without blemish*). That condition will be a wonderful blessing to himself. A Christ-like wife is not selfish. A Christ-like wife is not mean nor says mean things. A Christ-like wife does not crave the attention of other men or dress to get it. A Christ-like wife

is not materialistic. How do you expect to help your wife be like that apart from making a sacrifice to sanctify her with the Bible?

Our text contains a couple of very logical conclusions about the matter. Jesus taught us to love our neighbor as ourself. That is what the husband is supposed to do. His wife is his nearest neighbor. *He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh (vv.28b-29a).* This is as basic as the second part of the "Great Command." A lawyer asked, *"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:36-40).* It is difficult for most of us husbands to give an honest assessment about how well we do this.

If we are loving each other on this level, we will stick together. Once we become a member of Christ's body, we are in that relationship forever, *because we are members of his body (v.30).* Likewise, when a husband takes a wife, they are in that relationship for life. *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (v.31).*

The Mystery (vv.32-33).

What is this mystery about Christ and the Church? *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church (v.32).* For starters it is called a profound mystery. The Greek word means that it is a "mega" mystery. Again, a mystery was a wonderful truth from God that had not been revealed in previous times, such as to the Old Testament prophets, but which God has made known to us New Testament saints. This mystery is part of the great mystery Paul referred to five times in 1:9-3:9. The Church, including Jews and Gentiles, purchased by Christ through His sacrifice – Great news indeed. But even more, Christ pictures Himself as the Bridegroom and us as His precious Bride who He protects and provides for eternally.

Being a part of this mega-mystery should be a humbling reality to us. This is a "Cinderella story" on steroids. It is the picture of the

poverty-stricken, ugly little girl from the dysfunctional family having no chance in life, being pursued by and married to the Prince of the kingdom. In this story, we are the beasts and the beautiful King Jesus humbles Himself to take us as His eternal Bride. When we come to grips with what our "Divine Husband" does for us, we are greatly humbled.

So how do we roll that wonderful truth over into real-life circumstances of marriage? The text ends with two key words that help us make this standard work in real life. They are love and respect. *However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband (v.33).*

The "rule" is very clear. The husband must love his wife and the wife must respect her husband. Okay, but how does it work? The phrase speaks of a mutual love and respect much like mutual submission. Several verses previous to this verse, Paul taught that all Christians are to be *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21)*. Submission is a mutual requirement.

It is true that there is not a particular verse in the Bible that requires a wife to love her husband. Some surmise that is because a woman is more natural to love than to show respect. One can understand how respect might be a struggle because of the curse of sin by which the wife desires her husband's position of authority (Genesis 3:16). Some conclude that is why the wife's respect for her head is more difficult and thus emphasized. Along that same line of argument, some suppose that men find it easier to respect than to show self-sacrificing love.

However, the issue of mutual love and respect is foundational and critical for a God-honoring marriage. There have been hundreds (if not thousands) of books written about how to have a successful marriage. Many books, counselors, pastors, etc. advise that a successful marriage requires a multitude of rules. For example: If she does *this thing* the husband needs to respond like *this*. If he says *this*, the wife must be ready to respond with *this*. In this case, do *that* or in that case do *this*.

The problem in following that plan is that we end up like Pharisees with a collection of 613 rules that rivals the Talmud and the Mishna. Conversely, mutual love always responds, "I am willing to make a sacrifice in order to provide what is best." Mutual respect

always responds, “My spouse’s plans, purposes, and desires are as important to him/her as mine are to me.” Living harmoniously in marriage really is as simple as the Golden Rule: “Do to my spouse what I would like for my spouse to do to me.”

Being a good husband is almost as difficult as being a good wife. Because we are humans who are by nature selfish, we struggle to make the sacrifices necessary to become more like Christ. But becoming like Christ is the surest way to have a happy and effective marriage. We all do well to take time to assess our marriages and ask, “How well does this relationship reflect the relationship Christ has with the Church?”