

New Attitudes for Old Relationships

A Husband's Love – Part 1

Colossians 3:18-4:1

Christians proclaim the preeminence of Christ to the world by how we follow and lead.

LTS: Proverbs 31

We have been working our way through Paul's epistle to the Colossians and most recently we have found ourselves up against the section in chapter three where he speaks to issues related to marriage and family. It seemed appropriate to me, therefore, to tap the breaks a little and spend some extra time on these critical issues.

It's no secret that the ideal marriage God designed, and Adam and Eve enjoyed for a short time, has drifted a long way from paradise. It's been 10,000 years since the first wedding of a man and a woman in holy matrimony before the eyes of God. And while the institution of marriage has somehow managed to survive, some predict that it won't be long before it goes the way of the dinosaur; leaving hardly a fossilized wedding band behind.

If you read the newspaper and see the grocery store tabloids you might be tempted to believe such dire predictions are true. There's no denying the fact that marriage has all but lost its place of reverence and honor in society that it once enjoyed.

You know the statistics. Roughly one out of every two marriages in America ends in divorce. One of every three babies is born outside marriage, and one out of every four children live in a single parent home. The practice of cohabitation today exceeds anything we could have imagined a few decades ago.¹

Virtually every family in America has been touched by the disintegration of a marriage. And divorce is easier to obtain now than ever before. In fact, an attorney in Seattle has taken advantage of this trend by establishing an on-line "dissolve-it-yourself" website called completecase.com. A few years ago, he was already estimating that his service had aided a thousand couples to uncouple. The estranged husbands and wives need only agree on a few property and custody issues, fill out some forms, pay the \$249 fee, and it's done.

And what about all the millions of children of divorced parents? Well, many of them have grown to view marriage not as a means to joy, fulfillment and life-long happiness, but more like a debilitating disease they hope never to catch.

¹ World Magazine, Sep. 7, 2002

As a result, fewer young people are committing to marriage. Those who do generally wait until they are significantly older than their parents were when they got married. And some have taken it upon themselves to reinvent the institution altogether.

For example, World Magazine reports that in the Netherlands 15 Years ago, a young woman by the name of Jennifer Hose planned what has become known as the first postmodern marriage. At her wedding, she was both bride and groom. She told reporters, "We live in a 'Me' society, hence it is logical that one promises to be faithful to one's self." The wedding plans included a \$22,000 reception for her relatives. One commentator asked "I wonder if she will fall for the postmodern rage and adopt a double-barreled name - Jennifer Hose-Hose, for example? And what if she ceases to like herself - will divorce be an option, and which Hoes will get the car?"²

Well, its easy to poke fun at such absurdity, but the reality of what is happening to marriage in our day is tragic beyond measure. And the real tragedy is that it doesn't have to be this way! Marriage can and should be the means of tremendous fulfillment, satisfaction and joy. That's what God designed it to be. And frankly, I think Jennifer Hose has unwittingly put her finger on the problem.

You see the main reason marriage breaks down is because we are so committed to undying faithfulness NOT to our spouse but to ourselves. We enter marriage with thoughts of "What's in it for me?, Will this arrangement make me happy, satisfy my desires, enhance my joy?" Many marriages are grounded upon a fundamental a commitment to "me." The other person is there only to help actualize the fulfillment of my dreams. But if my spouse ever gets between me and my first love (me), its over!

We speak about all of this as if it were a modern phenomenon, but, of course, married men and women have struggled with these things since Adam and Eve were ushered out of paradise so many years ago. So, whenever the apostle Paul writes about Christian marriage, he attacks the problem at its root.

If your marriage is struggling this morning, the most probable cause is that one or both of you secretly believes the marital universe revolves around you. You probably (though perhaps unwittingly) view your mate as a means to your own happiness. Your goal is to get him/her to do the things that enhance your life, bring you fulfillment and secure your happiness. Paul says, that's exactly the wrong approach!

If you want your marriage to turn from Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained, you've got to start by recalibrating your commitments. Though it may sound counterintuitive at first, you actually need to shift your focus from pleasing self to pleasing the Lord, and from serving self to serving

² World Magazine, March 22, 2003

your spouse.

You see, the real issue in marital conflict is never a compatibility problem. It's a Lordship problem. Who are you committed to serving? If your commitment is to serve yourself, you are headed for disaster. But if you commit to serving the Lord of your marriage in obedience to His word, you will discover the path to joy that the world can only dream of. Paradise Lost can become Paradise Regained.

You may say, what does that kind of commitment look like? Paul offers the answer in Eph. 5:21. In marriage, as in the family, commitment takes on the form of selfless ministry. It's a total break from the wisdom of the world. It's a mindset that says, "Under the authority of Christ I willingly and joyfully choose to rank myself under my spouse for his/her good. I come to this marriage asking NOT "What can I get from my spouse?" but "What can I give her? How can I meet her needs? How can I serve her? How can I make her load a little lighter, her day a little brighter?"

What does that mean for the wife? Well, as we saw last time, it means that the path back to paradise begins with submission. It means submitting to her husband's headship in the home. Specifically,

- It means respecting him as the God-appointed leader, protector and provider... even if he is an unbeliever.
- It means relating to him in a way that resembles the way the church relates to Christ.
- It means giving him honor, support, help and encouragement.
- It means never belittling him or making his flaws a public spectacle but speaking well of him for his good and as a demonstration of the gospel.
- It means being a good manager of the home when he is gone.
- It also means respectfully pointing him back to the word of God when he drifts or falters, knowing that he will incur a stricter judgment as the leader of the home.
- It means praying for him and seeking the Lord's blessing upon his life.
- It means pursuing personal holiness and the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

That's what a submissive wife looks like. And that's the kind of commitment that will begin turning your marriage around.

But what about the husbands role in marriage? Well, in Col. 3:19 Paul simply writes, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them." Then, in the parallel passage (Eph. 5:25) Paul expands this instruction to husbands. Turn there with me if you haven't already, and follow with me starting with v. 25 (Read Eph. 5:25-33)

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 wives as their own bodies. He who loves his 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.

Now, somehow I managed to unpack God's instruction to the believing wife in a single message. But as you can see, it's going to take a little longer to unpack all that we husbands need to hear. So, let's dive in.

The first observation I want to make here is that when Paul speaks directly to husbands (Eph. 5:25) he does NOT command them to lead. Rather, he commands them to love. Why does he approach this subject in such a seemingly backwards way? Well, I suspect Paul knows from Genesis 3 that the sinful propensity of wives is to undermine their husbands. And the sinful propensity of husbands is to Lord their authority over their wives. Indeed, this is how many unbelieving couples relate to one another. But married Christians should be marked by mutual ministry and service to one another. The fact is, husbands are to lead. Witness 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 where we are told that if a man doesn't lead his family, he has no business leading the church. So the question is not "Should he lead but rather, How Should they Lead? Not in bitter resentment and control, but in sacrificial love.

Paul is telling us that when we get a new relationship with Christ, we also get a new relationship to our spouses. Whereas before Christ we lived for self, now we live for the Lord and for one another. Wives affirm their husband's headship through church-like submission and husbands exercise headship through Christ-like love. This is a prescription that is both hated by the world and loved by Christ's own.

Now if you think this is a radical way to think of marriage in our day, its hard to imagine how radical In was in Paul's. In the first century the husband was the supreme authority over his house. The state held the man up as the deity of his home. He had authority to do as he pleased with whom he pleased whenever it please him without threat or reprisal.

In the Roman culture, as in most cultures of the day, women were treated little better than slaves. In fact, Marcius Cato, the famous Roman statesman of the second century B.C., wrote, "If you catch your wife in an act of infidelity, you can kill her without a trial. But if she were to catch you, she would not venture to touch you with her finger. She has no rights."³

³ MacArthur *Ephesians*; p. 294

In an ancient love letter from a husband to his pregnant wife, we read, ‘If – good luck to you! You should bear offspring, if it is a male, let him live; if female, expose it.’⁴ In other words, take her into the forest and leave her for the wolves to consume.

“Demosthenes said, ‘We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately, and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs.’ Xenophon said it was the husbands aim that a wife ‘might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible and ask as little as possible.’⁵ In these early centuries marriage was virtually meaningless and the husband had absolute rule and freedom to do as he pleased.

The man wielded ultimate and sometimes tyrannical authority over his house with the state’s full approval, just as our state approves the slaughter of millions of unwanted babies. But in the household of faith; in families whose God is the Lord, things are to be radically different!

In the Christian home the husband is not to lead like a Roman soldier. That ambition is too low; too base; too unworthy a goal for one privileged to be a child of God. No, the Christian husband is to lead his wife like Christ leads His church. And that means he discards the scepter of a king and picks up the basin and towel of a servant. He is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

And beloved, this is exactly what happened when Jesus began his ministry. Everywhere Jesus traveled and the gospel was embraced, the status of women was elevated. This was true in Paul’s ministry as well. And to this very day, where there is a biblical church and bible-saturated men, women are esteemed and, honored, cared for, and loved.

Now we have already seen what the submission of a Spirit-filled Christian wife is to look like. But what is the love of a spirit-filled husband to look like? Well there are four kinds of love by which he is to lead and serve his wife. To be plain, his love for her is to be Sacrificial, Purifying, Attentive, and Unbreakable.

The godly Christian husband is to lead his wife with..

I. A Sacrificial Love (25)

1. The radical nature of the love a Christian husband ought to have for his wife is illustrated NOT by the Roman Soldier, but by the living Christ.
2. Far from being the family tyrant or deity, the Christian husband is to take his cues from the

⁴ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus movement became the world’s largest religion*, New York, Harper Coliins, 2011), 126

⁵ Kent Hughes *Ephesians*; 190

Son of God Himself who “did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45).

3. A Christian husband’s love for his wife is first of all to be sacrificial. In other words, he is to die to self. He should value his wife’s needs above his needs; her desires as his desires; her opinions as his own. As she is ranking herself under him in submission, he ranks himself under her in sacrificial love... even as he leads.

4. Now let’s make this practical. What does dying to self in marriage look like, men?

- A. First it looks like giving up time at the office, or on the golf course, or on the lake or whatever captures your interest simply to accompany your wife in doing what she is interested in doing or meeting some need. That might mean taking her shopping without a murmuring spirit. It might mean taking the time to fix a leaky faucet or a broken appliance. In the Kirk home for at least 16 years of our marriage it meant being willing to change thousands upon thousands of dirty diapers. It may require any number of things. The point is, husbands, you are called to serve her even as you lead.
- B. Second, Sacrificial love looks like prayer. Loving your wife like Christ loves the church means you will pray for her like Jesus prays for you. Hebrews tells us that Christ “always lives to make intercession for” us (7:25). Christian husband, do you pray for your wife? Do you seek the Lord about her spiritual needs, her need for wisdom and strength to manage the children at home. Are you praying about the pressures she is under, her friendships, her love for Christ. Do you pray with her? Yes, it takes time, but this is what it means to love her sacrificially.
- C. Third, Sacrificial love means that you are attentive to her. “Years ago in the Midwest the story was told of a farmer and his wife who were lying in bed during a storm when suddenly the funnel of a tornado lifted the roof right off their house and sucked their bed away with them still in it. The wife began to cry. The Farmer called out to her that it was no time to cry. But she called back that she couldn’t help it, as she was so happy. It was the first time they had been out together in twenty years!”⁶

Men, are you attentive to you wife’s needs? Do you know when she needs a break, or a word of encouragement, an affirmation of your love. Does she know that you treasure her above all else? Do spend time with her just to affirm that she’s the priority of your life? Do you notice when she is down, or hurting? Are attentive to her?

- D. Kent Hughes writes: “ I have seen “couch-potatoes” who order their wives and children around like the grand sultan of Morocco - adulterous misogynists with the domestic ethics of “Jabba the Hut” who cow their wives around with Bible verses about submission - insecure men whose wives do not dare go to the grocery without

⁶ R. Kent Hughes *Ephesians*; p. 191

permission, who even tell their wives how to dress.”⁷

Men, don't treat your wife like that. For the glory of God and your own joy, be attentive to her needs. Treat her with the precious dignity she deserves as a “fellow heir of the grace of life”.

E. Finally, Sacrificial love means that you remain faithful to her. Men, let me make this clear. Any woman who is not your wife is off limits to you. Your flesh may tempt you in a variety of immoral ways, but you must die to those thoughts and feelings. In Paul's words, you must put them to death. And this applies not only to real women you know, but also to any you may find through some explicit media. You know what I'm talking about. Men, Pornography is waaaay out of bounds for a Christian husband. And don't give your wife any lame excuse about if she participates with you its okay. That's nothing but an obvious attempt to dress up a crock of putrefied lust, and the Lord hates it. If you are dabbling in that stuff perhaps you need to question whether you have any grace at all. (by the way, if you need help breaking the grip of such an enslaving habit, there are men in this church who are trained and available to help you. You need but to ask. The woman that God has given you is a precious gift. Treat her that way, not only in your outward expressions of sacrificial love but also in the secret places of your heart.

5. Men, Christian marriage is to be permeated with sacrificial love; the same kind of love Christ had for his church when He gave himself up for her.

6. So the husband's love is to be a sacrificial love. But it is also to be a Purifying love. And we will talk about that next time.

Conclusion:

Men, I realize that being reminded of God's high standard for Christian husbands can feel unachievable. But remember this: God gives us all the grace we need to please him. He does not expect you to be perfect. But he does expect you to be growing. And he expects you to live by repentance and faith.

If you don't know the Lord today, I want to invite you to come to him in faith. Trying to be a better husband will never save you. But eternal life is freely available to you if you realize that you are spiritually bankrupt and in desperate need for Christ Himself to redeem you, rescue you, and reconcile you to God. Come to him in faith today and he will receive you.

Christians proclaim the preeminence of Christ to the world by how we follow and lead.

⁷ Ephesians, by Dr. Kent Hughes; p. 181-182.

