

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TWENTY-ONE

The Most Challenging of All Relationships (Part Two)

Ephesians 5:25–33

God gave us a marriage pattern to follow. He didn't consult the culture or seek the interest of the media. He set the pattern, gave us the right threads, and said, "Weave them together in your life. Just follow the pattern."

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

GOD'S design for marriage is as intricate and beautiful as a masterfully woven tapestry. God has carefully chosen each thread in His pattern and handed them to husbands and wives. Together, spouses with their Lord knit a lovely work of art.

The most striking element in God's design is how He intertwines human marriage with Christ's marriage to His church. Like vibrant silk threads, husbands, wives, Christ, and His church are divinely interlaced in marriage, portraying the wonder of the divine-human relationship.

In their book, *Intimate Allies*, Dan Allender and Tremper Longman point to another lofty truth:

Every marriage is meant to represent God: his perfect relationship with himself—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as well as his relationship with his people.¹

God patterned Christian marriage, not only after our union with Christ and our union with one another but also the union of the Trinity itself. Paul has been developing these grand themes of unity and reconciliation since the first lines of his letter. And to think, these concepts weave together a masterpiece of divine dimensions in the ordinary, day-to-day, kitchen-table relationship of a husband and wife.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

As we prepare our heart for this study, recall Paul’s overarching command: “Submit to one another *out of reverence for Christ*” (Ephesians 5:21, emphasis added). Our reverence for Christ motivates all our most important relationships, not just marriage. Take a moment to express your reverence for Christ in a prayer of praise. Whether or not you are married, you can stand in awe of God’s design for marriage and let its wonder draw you closer to Him.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the previous study we looked at what “submit to one another” means for wives. Now, how does a husband apply, “Submit to one another” (Ephesians 5:21)? The answer is by loving his wife as Christ loved the church. A husband sees his role as “the head of his wife” (5:23), not as a license to lord it over his wife but as a mandate to protect, nurture, and serve her.

Paul details the specifics of the husband’s loving servant-leader role in [5:25–33](#). Read this passage in the New Living Translation and The Message. If you’re married, personalize your reading as if Paul is addressing you and your wife. Replace *husbands* or *wives* and related pronouns with your name or your spouse’s name and see how the passage speaks directly to you.



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Observation: A Word to Husbands

In *Searching the Scriptures*, when we observe a passage, we try to identify main points, which often emerge from the commands.² Once we identify a pattern or list, we can see how the subpoints flow after each main point. Can you identify Paul's two primary commands to husbands in *Ephesians 5:25, 28*? Write them in the space below.

Like an officer to his troops, Paul issued these orders to men and then added a comparison to each command. Can you observe the subpoints that flow from the *first* command and comparison? From the verses below, identify the ways Christ loved the church and write down how you think these ways are similar to how husbands should love their wives.

For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. (Ephesians 5:25–27)

Can you observe the subpoints that flow from Paul's *second* command and comparison? From the verses below, identify the ways a man cares for his own body and write down how you think these ways are similar to how husbands should love their wives.



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In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. And we are members of his body. (Ephesians 5:28–30)

According to 5:31–32, what is the *reason* a husband loves his wife as his own body?

This truth must have stunned Paul’s readers who lived in a society that considered women second to men, not one with them. What scriptural proof did Paul cite for this truth? And how did he connect this truth to our oneness with Christ?

Christ tenderly cares for us as He does His own body—because we *are* His body. We are one with Him. Likewise, husbands and wives are “one flesh” with each other through the beauty of sexual union and shared lives (5:31 NASB).



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When we nourish and cherish our wives, there is a union that is formed that is deeper than a word can describe. It becomes a phenomenon that defies full understanding. So profound and unexplainable that two people this different can become this unified is a mystery.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: To Love Is . . .

The metaphors in this passage illustrate four vital principles for husbands in any era. These principles are golden threads in God’s design for marriage that we can stitch into our own marriages.

To Love Is to Sacrifice—Ephesians 5:25

A husband’s love for his wife, according to Paul, is no ordinary love. It is *agapē*, a form of sacrificial love that can be learned only at the feet of Jesus. Christ loved His bride so much that He “gave up his life for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

What principle was Paul teaching husbands about the extent of their love for their wives? What does “[giving] up his life for her” mean for ordinary husbands?

When my love is like the love of Christ for the church, I give up things for my wife. Love starts with sacrifice. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

To Love Is to Sanctify—Ephesians 5:26a

A husband links arms with Christ in His purpose for His bride, “to make her holy” (Ephesians 5:26). In his commentary, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains how a husband’s love can have a sanctifying influence on his wife.



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Just as Christ’s relationship with His church promotes spiritual growth, so husbands are expected to nurture positive growth in their wives. This might mean freeing up time for your wife to exercise her own gifts, talents, and interests. It certainly means helping her through her hurts, caring about her wounds, being at her side when she needs someone to lean on—anything that contributes to her wholeness and well-being.³

What principle can you draw about the purpose of a husband’s love for his wife?

To Love Is to Forgive—Ephesians 5:26b

Christ also cleansed His bride, the church, “by the washing of water with the word” (Ephesians 5:26 NASB)—which is a beautiful metaphor for forgiveness. Husbands love like Christ by forgiving their wives just as God has forgiven their wives and them as husbands. What principle can you draw about the cleansing duty of a husband’s love?

At times, your wife may do things for the wrong motive. She may be stubborn or will say things that later she regrets. Your role is to forgive her. Forgive her before she even asks for forgiveness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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To Love Is to Honor—Ephesians 5:27

Christ will one day present believers “as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). Paul imagined the church as a bride in her wedding dress being presented to her groom. This is her moment of highest honor as she walks down the aisle while all eyes gaze at her admiringly.

Husbands also have a duty to honor their brides not just on her wedding day but every day. What principle can you draw from this metaphor?

Wives look for someone who will see in her the significance of her person and her place. This is the husband’s task. No one else can honor a wife like her husband can or should.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Showing Honor in Specific Ways

Peter expands the fourth principle with specific examples. Read the following verse and highlight the ways husbands can show honor to their wives.

In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God’s gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)



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How might a husband treat his wife with understanding and as an equal partner? Do this. On the other hand, how might he neglect to understand her and treat her as less than himself? Don't do this!

What wife wouldn't submit to a husband who treated her with understanding and who loved her as sacrificially, tenderly, and purely as Christ loved His bride? Certainly, she would. All of us long to be loved and respected, nourished and cherished. Let's bring these attitudes and actions into our marriages and watch Christ transform them into a mirror of His awesome grace.

Application: Love and Respect

Admiring God's magnificent design for marriage, Paul concluded: "So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (Ephesians 5:33). As a husband loves his wife, she respects him in return; as she respects, he loves her all the more. What a perfect balance of give and take, duty and blessing, action and response in a wedding-band circle of mutual submission.

What points stand out to you in this study and the previous study that you can put into practice? Wives, how can you respect your husband as you submit to Christ? Husbands, how can you love your wife as He loves her?



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In what ways can you bring *agapē* to life in your marriage? How can you work more for your spouse's highest good in the words you say and the deeds you do?

In God's design for marriage, many threads hold couples together—spools full of daily acts of kindness, caring, respect, sacrifice, forgiveness, honor, nourishment, and cherishing. All these golden threads interlace with the love of Christ to make an unbreakable bond. It takes effort, but is marriage worth it? It most certainly is!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You gave Your Son not only as a model of love but as the One who fills me with the love I lack for my spouse. Pour Your love through Your Son over me so that it can flow from me to the one I so dearly want to love but sometimes have trouble loving. Make my marriage Your masterpiece and may I give all the glory to You. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, *Intimate Allies* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1995), xviii.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 286.

