

As Christ Loved the Church

Instructions for Husbands from Ephesians 5

By Daryl Wingerd

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25).

If you're like me, a Christian husband who takes the Bible seriously, you probably hang your head after reading that command from the Lord (via Paul's pen). Is he serious? He expects imperfect *me* to love my wife the way *he* loved the church? Wow! That seems impossible!



That's an understandable response . . . at first. But then, if you're like me, you come to grips with the fact that he actually expects you to do as he commands. Not only that, he connects your obedience to this command (along with all the rest of his commands) to your love for him. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Furthermore, you come to realize as you continue meditating on this command from Jesus, that this is one of *the* most important commands for me to obey as a Christian husband. You come to this conclusion when you realize that a few verses later, the Lord (via Paul's pen) makes a direct comparison between the marriage of a husband and a wife, and the relationship between Christ and his church. Wow! This is important!

So then, as a man who truly does love Jesus, and as one now filled with humble and trembling resolve, you begin to reflect on what this command means for your role in your marriage. What does "as Christ loved the church" mean to me as a husband? How must I act toward my wife if I am to love her as Christ loved the church? Consider three answers that I came up with after asking myself those same questions:

It means your love for your wife must be self-sacrificing. As Jesus' love for the church motivated him to lay aside his status in eternal glory, humble himself by becoming a man, and willingly give his body to a tortuous death on the cross for the redemption of his people, your love for your wife must be similarly sacrificial. Basically, you must love her by giving up yourself for her. You will demonstrate your self-sacrificing love for her by dedicating to her your time, your full attention, your energy, your affection, your kindness, your devoted faithfulness, and

your material resources. Nothing that you have is not hers. Nothing that would not be good for her can be considered good for you. You will lay aside anything and everything necessary to place the priority of her wellbeing ahead of your own. Selfishness must be a thing of the past for you as her husband. Just as Christ manifested no selfishness toward his bride, there can be no selfishness on your part in your marriage—none!

It means your love for your wife must be unconditional. When Jesus gave his life for the church, we were unredeemed, fallen, wicked, undeserving sinners (cf. Romans 5:8). He did not die for us because he found something noble or worthy in us. He died for us though we had no such worth. In fact, he died for us though we hated him and loved the darkness (John 3:19-20). Even now, his steadfast love for us continues though we often grieve him by our sin. Therefore, if you are to love your wife as Christ loved the church, your love for her cannot be allowed to hinge upon her personal merits or her conduct. You love her unconditionally *because she is your wife*—because you have set your steadfast love upon her as Christ set his upon his church. A husband's love that is withheld or withdrawn when his wife falls short in some way (at least in his estimation) is not a Christlike love.

It means your love for your wife must be initiatory. In other words, it must be a love that leads the way and inspires love and respect in return. Jesus loved the church first. As a result of his love for us, we love him. As John wrote, "We love him because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This would be the easiest aspect of this command to keep if it merely meant that you were the one who initiated the relationship, or the one who proposed marriage to her. If that were all that this implied, your work would be done. But it means far more than that. It means your love for her leads the way for both of you through difficult changes of life and conflicts in your marriage. It means your love for her leads the way in being slow to take offense and eager to reconcile. It means your love for her is what inspires and compels her to love and respect you. It means that though your wife is commanded to respect and love you (Eph. 5:33; Titus 2:4), your love for her must be the kind that makes these commands a joy for her to obey.