

Marriage And The Gospel Part 2

Ephesians 5:22-33

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It's our joy this morning to continue our study on marriage to the glory of God. If you would, turn to Ephesians 5. That's the text we'll be in today. Ephesians chapter 5. Of course, you know, in our culture, it's customary for a man to declare his intentions of marriage through the means of a proposal that culminates in the giving of a wedding ring. I remember that time in my own life like it was yesterday, the feeling of that ring burning a hole in my pocket.

Rebecca and I had been looking at wedding rings for some time, and I got an idea of what she would like and went to a local jeweler and got to pick out the diamonds for the ring and the ring itself, the setting. Finally, I got to go pick it up and just filled my heart with joyous anticipation of what it would be like to finally give that to her and ask the question. I'd planned to ask her to marry me on my birthday, which young men, I'll just say, don't do that unless you're certain that she will say yes, otherwise your birthday will be forever changed.

But I was pretty confident that she would say yes. The problem was I got the ring about a month before my birthday, and every night was just torture. I had this ring burning a hole in my hand. I would get it out before I'd go to bed, and I would look at it, I would stare at it, I would think of what it would be like to ask her the question. I just wanted to say, forget the whole plan, I'm just going over and I'm asking her now.

I was thinking about that, those nights of staring at that wedding ring, and it got me thinking about a diamond ring in general. I want you to think for a moment about the way a ring is designed. First, there's some kind of precious metal that's formed into the shape of a ring, usually gold, with different kinds of ornate designs perhaps, or maybe simple. But at the top of that gold ring is a setting, and that setting is designed not only to hold the diamond firmly in place, but to display it, to give the diamond prominence, so that what catches your eye on that ring is really not the ring itself, but the diamond, which helps us understand what's the point of the ring.

The point of the ring is not really itself, but it is to promote the beauty of the diamond. The same thing is true when it comes to our purpose as Christians, and the purpose of Christian marriage. God has made us as individual believers to be like that ring holding up the glory of Christ that others would see in us the good news of the gospel, the transforming power of grace.

The same thing is true for Christian marriage. Christian marriage, when a husband and wife are both believers pursuing God's design for marriage, is to hold up the gospel and Christ Himself to the world. This morning, we have the privilege of seeing exactly how it is that God's designed marriage to accomplish this wonderful goal.

Now, so far in our marriage series, if you've been with us, we've began by studying why we exist. We exist for the glory of God, to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Everything has to begin with that overarching purpose and goal.

But secondly, we saw God's perfect design for marriage in Genesis chapter 2, and then the unfortunate corruption of marriage and life itself in Genesis chapter 3, but also the promise of a Redeemer in Genesis 3.15, that one would come to crush the head of the serpent. And then last week, we looked at the gospel and how it is that He redeems His people through the gospel in Titus chapter 3. There, we learned that the gospel itself is the lifeblood of marriage. If marriage is not only to survive but thrive in the way that God intends, it will be because it is permeated with the gospel.

Last week, we saw that category one, **The Gospel Transforms You**. The gospel transforms us by the power of the Holy Spirit through the process of regeneration in which we are given new spiritual life. It results in justification, adoption, sanctification, and finally glorification.

Unless you are born again, unless you are made new by the Holy Spirit, you cannot live in a way that pleases the Lord or have a marriage that is in accordance with His design in Scripture. So it has to begin there.

But next, we turn to a second category this morning that we'll begin to study and finish next time. Category number two, **The Gospel Transforms Marriage**. Not only us, but marriage itself. Let's read together our passage, Ephesians 5, verses 22-33. Paul writes:

"22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 25 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 own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own 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, over the next couple of weeks, we're going to unpack this basic idea that **The gospel transforms the motivation, standard, and purpose for marriage**. The gospel transforms the motivation, standard, and purpose for marriage. And in this passage, we'll see three key truths. Two of those we'll see today, and one we'll save for next time.

But truth number one is that **The Gospel Transforms Wives**. One of the reasons that the gospel transforms marriage is because the gospel transforms wives. Verse 22, *Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord*. Now, as we begin to discuss this, what I want you to notice first of all is what is not new information in verse 22.

Paul's admonition for wives to submit to their husbands is not new to us. We saw it a couple of weeks ago in the creation order itself, in the way that God made Adam and Eve and the covenant of marriage. From the very beginning, God explicitly said he made Eve to be the helpmate of Adam.

God made Adam first as the leader and head of the family, and then he made Eve to come alongside to be a helpmate suitable for him. So, we learn two crucial truths there. One, Eve is Adam's equal in personhood. She's also made in the image of God. But secondly, Eve's God-given role is to submit to the leadership of her husband and to help him accomplish the task that God gave them.

But what I want you to see is the concept of submission is not new. What should catch your eye in this verse is the last phrase, *as to the Lord*. This is where the gospel intervenes in marriage and transforms our understanding. Remember, in Genesis 3, as a consequence of the fall, we saw what would be the primary fallout between the relationship of the husband and the wife.

Genesis 3:16, in the second half: *"Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you."*

The primary effect that the fall had on home life was the struggle now between the husband and a wife. The husband in the garden, Adam, would have lovingly led his wife. That would have come naturally to him. His wife naturally would have submitted to his leadership, and they would have had a perfect, harmonious relationship. But now, the wife will struggle in that role of submission, seeking to exert her authority at times over him, and the husband will respond by ruling over her.

And in context here, the idea is not ruling over her in a loving way, but with a heavy hand forcing her back into submission. This is where the struggle of marriage began, Genesis 3. This is where the battle of the sexes began, Genesis 3:16. What you have to understand is that the wife's role of submission to her husband is not hers because she's a Christian. I want to make that really clear. It's not as if you get saved, and now suddenly God's command to you is just to submit to your husband. This is how God made creation.

Every marriage is accountable to God to follow the pattern that God made. The difference is, in Christ, husbands and wives have been transformed through the gospel, and now suddenly the way that God made us to operate in marriage becomes possible in increasing measure as we're transformed by the Holy Spirit.

And so it says, not just wives, submit to your husbands. It says, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. In Colossians, it says, *as is fitting in the Lord*. The idea is the motivation and the ability to obey the command to submit to your husband has radically been equipped and changed because you are in Christ.

Look at what Paul's doing. He's saying, wives, you should be motivated and encouraged to obey God's command of submission to your husband, not because of him and not just because it's part of the creation order, but because you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the standard. That's the motivation. It's now your love and your admiration and your

trust in Christ that motivates the submission to your husband. The submission of the wife now is directly tied to her submission to Christ himself. It's as if Paul is saying, wives, you are to consider God's command to submit to the authority of your husband as a means of expressing your love and submission to your Savior.

Now that's a truth that will radically transform the way we think about submission. After all, what makes submission to your husband difficult? Is it not sin? Sin. Your sin and his sin. That's what makes it hard. But who is it that came to deal with sin? Christ.

You see where he's going with this? *As to the Lord*, your hope is in Christ for yourself and for your husband. That means that Christ can give a wife the grace to kill the sins of pride and selfishness that we all are tempted towards to then ignore or subvert her husband's authority. He can help you to kill those sins and submit to your husband as an overflow of your submission and love for Christ.

But secondly, it gives us the all-important answer to the question that's so common and understandable. How do I submit to my husband when his sin against me makes it very difficult? The answer is, you don't do it ultimately for him. It's not about him. It's about your love for Christ. It's because you love and admire Christ that you make the choice. And when you do that, ladies, particularly when you do that, when your husband in the human sense doesn't deserve that, then you become like that ring holding up the diamond of the gospel.

The world doesn't understand that. That makes no sense to the world, to your unbelieving family, to your unbelieving friends. Why in the world are you being so kind and tender and submissive to him when he is the way he is? Well, let me tell you why. It's the gospel of grace. This is how we make the gospel shine. It's one of the ways.

But not only is the motivation changed in Christ, the standard is changed by the gospel of Christ. Look back at the passage here in verse 23:

"23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything."

Now, the implications of what's said here are really hard to quantify. There's so much that we could say about these verses, but let me just point out some key truths we need to focus on.

First of all, Paul gives us the reason why it's right that a wife should submit to her husband. He says it's because the husband is the head of the wife, by God's design, that is, God has ordained order in the home as well as in other areas of society.

But next, Paul goes on to introduce, for the first time here in this passage, what we'll call a gospel thread that's going to run through the rest of the passage that really colors everything about marriage. And this gospel thread will transform the way you think about God's standard for marriage, because he illustrates the headship of the husband over the wife with the headship of Christ over the church, *as Christ is the head of the church*. Now, this is the first glimpse of what's going to become a mysterious picture in which Paul is saying that there is and always has been a divinely intended correlation between the

relationship that a husband will have with his wife and the relationship that Christ would have with the church. These things go together, and what we're going to find out as we get further into the passage next time is that this is not new, it's newly revealed to us, but this has always been God's divine intention.

Christ is the rightful head of the church, of course, because he's the savior of the body, it says. Verse 23, *"...He Himself being the Savior of the body."* Husbands are not the savior of their wives, but Christ is, He's the savior of them both.

And so wives think of it this way, you're not only a bride to your earthly husband, but you're part of the body of Christ and therefore part of the bride of Christ himself. In that sense, you are twice a bride. And because of that, because of ultimately the headship of Christ, you willingly arrange yourself under the authority of your husband, guided and motivated by the standard that Christ has set in His relationship with the church.

The husband's the head of the wife because God's ordained it to be so, but when you as a Christian wife think about what should motivate you in your submission, it's not ultimately your husband or even the created order that should drive you, but it is the picture of the church and the church's relationship to Christ its Savior. That is the illustration that you ought to bring to mind to motivate you and even to provide the standard for how and when you submit to your husband.

That's what he goes on to clarify. Now, just how extensive is this? Verse 24:
"But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything."

Now, when we understand the fact that the standard for a Christian's wife's submission to her husband is the submission of the church to Christ, it puts everything in really clear vision. It's an exhaustive command. It gives clear parameters. When we think about the case of Christ and His church, there are no exceptions to which the church says, well, I'm not going to submit to that command from Christ. There are no caveats.

So the obvious point that Paul is making is that it's just as pervasive that a wife is to submit holistically to the leadership of her husband, understanding that God will hold him accountable for how he has led his family. God holds him accountable for that, but he holds you accountable for how you obey this command to willingly submit to his leadership.

But also we need to think about this command in its context because it does provide some guardrails and some protections for wives as we think about this in the light of verse 22. Because remember, it started with this command that you're to be subject to your husband *as to the Lord*. Now, that's very helpful because it means that Christ is the ultimate authority in the life of every Christian, husband and wife. The husband's authority is only a delegated authority that is a secondary authority under the authority of the headship of Christ.

So what are the implications of that? Well, in any instance in which a wife is forced to choose between submitting to her husband or submitting to the clear commands of Christ, Christ wins every time. There is no competition. That means that it's outside of a husband's

authority to command his wife to do something the Scriptures forbid or to forbid her from doing something the Scriptures command.

In addition to that, a wife's role of submission to her husband does not mean that God would require her to remain in a home with an abusive husband. Wives, hear me on this. If your husband is sinfully abusing his authority over you by means of physical violence or threats of physical violence, you are not disobeying this command to seek help and to get yourself and your children physically out from under that man's control.

And the reason we know that is because husbands are not the only authority that God has given to a wife. The Bible also says that God's put other human authorities in our lives, such as government, which is to be an instrument for our good, as well as church leadership, to come alongside and to help and to protect and intervene in these times. And so, sadly, we live in a fallen world. I hate I have to give this caveat, but I've learned from experience it is needed. If you are a wife in an abusive situation, you can flee that situation and get help. Either call the authorities or seek out church leadership, but we will help you in that situation to intervene.

But outside of those two caveats of a husband telling a wife to disobey what is clearly commanded in Scripture or an abusive situation, a wife is to submit to the authority of her husband. The passage says, *in everything*. This applies if you're in a situation and you're unequally yoked, if you're married to an unbeliever.

1 Peter 3:1-6, makes it clear that even still, with those two caveats in place, you are to submit to his leadership. It applies to a wife who's married to a husband who claims to be a believer, but is not living in a way where he is selflessly loving you in the way he should. Again, 1 Peter 3:1-6, makes that clear.

But this is how the gospel transforms marriage, because it empowers a Christian woman filled with the Holy Spirit to obey her Savior, even when it's extremely difficult because of her circumstances.

It's compounded, ladies, because your husband's not only a sinner, but he's finite, which means there will be times that a decision has to be made in your home, and your opinions differ on which is best for your family. And your husband doesn't have all knowledge, although sometimes he may act as if he does, but he doesn't.

You are your husband's helpmate, which includes graciously offering wisdom and opinions in the decision-making process, but at the end of the day, God holds your husband accountable for making that decision. And if and when he makes a decision that you deem to be unwise or that you simply don't prefer, the way you calm your heart is by reminding yourself that your ultimate goal in life is not to have your own way or even please your husband. It is to glorify Christ.

And so your faithfulness to God, then, becomes the ultimate goal. So when your husband makes a decision and you disagree, and perhaps it turns out you were right, and now the family's experiencing the negative consequences of that poor decision, you lay your head on the pillow at night in peace because you obeyed your Savior to follow the leadership of your husband, and God is able to hold him accountable. Trust me. God can hold your husband

accountable in ways that you never ever could imagine. So pray for your husband. Love your husband. Submit to your husband and entrust yourself ultimately to Christ, your Savior, and His sovereign care over your life and family.

The gospel makes it clear that our obedience is not contingent on the obedience of others. It's only contingent on our relationship with Christ. Your motivation and your strength to submit to your husband comes from the overflow of your love for Christ your Savior. And when you do that, when that is your motivation, it is then that you become like that ring holding up the diamond of the gospel as a light for the world to see.

Now, just quickly, before we move on from this, I do want to make sure that we understand submission biblically. What does it mean? What does the term mean? Because it's often misused and often abused. Literally, the Greek word is defined as "to subject oneself, be subjected, or subordinated" depending on the context in which it's used. And the New Testament clearly defines that submission is the role of a Christian wife. And in every passage that teaches on marriage, submission is always listed. There are other roles listed for wives, and we're going to get to those in coming weeks. But in every list, submission appears on the list.

And this verb is almost always in what's called the middle voice. Now, the middle voice in the Greek language is important because it emphasizes that the person is doing the action to himself or herself. So the point of that is that this is to be a submission by your own willful choice.

Husbands are never to force submission on their wives. In fact, nowhere in the passage here or anywhere in Scriptures does it say husbands, ensure that your wives submit to you. It doesn't give us that command or that authority. God is the one who is to convict and sanctify our wife in that way.

So each wife, then, is to make the daily choice as an equal image-bearer of God to delight in honoring her Savior by willfully choosing to sit under the authority of her husband. And husbands, let me say, when your wife struggles with submission, and she will, as we all struggle with submission to the authorities in our lives, you pray for her, you lead her continually with humility and with patience and love, remembering that you, too, are a sinner who falls short of the glory of God. You don't try to force her into submission. You leave room for the Holy Spirit to be the Holy Spirit, and he will work in your wife.

What's also informative here is when we tie this command to submit to Genesis chapter 2 and the fact that Eve was made to be a helper for Adam. He does not say, I will make a slave for Adam to simply do his bidding. God made Adam a companion. He made Adam a friend. He would be an intimate friend that would be a real, tangible help to him, not just in the physical work that she would provide at his side, but even in her intelligence and in her ideas. She's made an equal image-bearer with all the reasoning capacity that Adam had so that she could be the kind of help that he actually needed.

So it's true. As the head of the home, men, God has given you the responsibility to lead and to make biblical decisions for your family, but do not neglect the gift of help that He's given to you and your wife.

So, wives, in summary, you're created to be a helpmate to your husband, but you're to do so in a way that respects the authority that God's given to him, making the willful choice to submit to him in everything outside of those categories I mentioned, ultimately for the glory of Christ. And as you do that, you hold up the gospel for the world to see.

But the good news here for you wives is that the gospel not only transforms wives, the gospel transforms husbands. The gospel transforms husbands. Verse 25: *"Husbands, love your wives,"*

Of all the instructions in the New Testament given to Christian husbands, the command to love our wives is by far the most prominent teaching. Love is to be the hallmark of the Christian husband. Isn't it interesting how the gospel shapes Paul's instruction here? I find this fascinating. As I was looking at this again this week, it's a familiar passage, the wife is instructed to submit to her husband. And if we're thinking logically then, what would be the counterpart command to that command for the husband? So wives, submit to your husband. Husband, lead your wife or even exercise authority over your wife, we might expect. That's not what he says. Wives, submit to your husbands. *Husbands, love your wives.* Love your wives.

Just as the grammar was helpful as we looked at the word for submission, the grammar is helpful here with the word "love" because love in this case is a present active imperative or command. What that means is, first of all, it's in the present tense. It's an ongoing action. This is not to be just you saying, I love you at the altar on your wedding day. This is to be the pervasive characterization of who you are, moment by moment, second by second, day in, day out. The ongoing continual pattern of the husband.

But not only that, it's an active verb, which means it's a willful choice. It's not simply an emotional response, which is how the world most often defines love. Love is you make me feel really good, and so because you make me feel really good, I love you. Now, even with biblical love, emotions can arise, certainly out of that love, but it is not an emotion. It is a choice, a daily continual choice, and it's a command. It's not optional for the husband. Love your wives. No caveat. No condition, and the simplicity of that command is helpful for us because there's no wiggle room. It's not love your wives except for, you know, after you've done it real well for six days of the week, and on the seventh day, if you're not feeling up to it, you know, take a day off. There are no days off.

The word itself is defined this way. It's "to have a warm regard for and interest in another, cherish, have affection, love." So when we put all that together then, what Paul's commanding of husbands is to daily choose to have a warm regard and interest for your wife. We're to set our affections on our wives. It's not an accident that Paul fails to mention any equality in our wives as a prerequisite for our love. It's not based on anything within them or anything they lack.

And this is a truth that I really can't overemphasize. If I put you to sleep so far and you've missed everything else, please write this down. This is crucial for husbands and wives both. And that is this, that the roles that God has given to husbands and wives in Christian marriage are independent of one another. They're independent. This is what I mean.

Marriage is not 50-50. It's not you scratch my back and I scratch yours. Marriage is 100% and 100%. The commands given to wives are independent of any obedience on the part of the husband. And the commands given to husbands are independent of any obedience or disobedience on the part of the wife.

It is, if you want to honor Christ in your marriage, you love your wife with all you've got regardless of how well she submits to you and respects you. And wives, if you want to honor Christ, you submit to his authority, love him, respect him, even when he's difficult to do that to. We don't get to excuse ourselves when our spouse is having a bad day.

Harold Hohner says it this way: "Husbands are commanded to love their wives unconditionally, not only if their wives are submissive. Rather, husbands are to love their wives in obedience to the Lord and because of the example of Christ's love. It is not the duty of the wife to tell Him to love her. It is His duty to the Lord to love her."

Men, this is the kind of unwavering, unyielding, day-in, day-out love that we're to demonstrate to our wives. This is a love transformed by the gospel.

What's interesting is Paul's command to wives to submit to their husbands would not have been abnormal in that culture. It would have been expected. But the command to husbands to love their wives would have raised a few eyebrows. Douglas Moose says it this way: "Requiring wives to submit to husbands, as we have noted, matches widespread Greek and Jewish teaching about marriage. Requiring husbands to love their wives does not."

So Paul was calling the men of the church, and he is today calling us to break the mold of the culture around us and to love our wives as an overflow of our love for Christ day-in and day-out. And that is the environment in which a wife is called to submit, ultimately. In God's design, when He calls a woman to submit, His desire is that she's submitting to a man who is seeking to love her unconditionally. And so by our love, men, we're to make it a joy and a delight for our wives to submit to our leadership, not a burden.

So how do we ensure that we do that? How can we live this out in practical ways? Well, just as the call from Paul was for wives to look to Christ for their motivation and their standard, the same thing obviously applies to us as husbands. He is the motivation and the standard. And so he goes on to give us **Two Descriptions of How the Gospel Should Transform A Husband's Love.**

We'll look at the first of those today and the second one next time. But here's description number one. We're to love our wives **As Christ Loves the Church**, as Christ loves the church.

Verse 25:

"25 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."

Again, Paul says the standard and the motivation for every Christian husband's love of their wife is Christ, and specifically the love that Christ demonstrates towards His bride, which is the church.

Now, this is a high calling. It's one that none of us can fulfill in perfection, but it ought to be the direction of our lives as we grow into this kind of love of our wives by the power of the Spirit at work in us. And there are two primary aspects of this love that Christ has for the church that we ought to emulate. Aspect number one we'll call **A Sacrificial Love**, a sacrificial love.

"25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,"

So the primary display, obviously, of Christ's love for the church was on the cross as He gave His life for the church. He bought the church by His own blood. This was selfless sacrifice on His part to the point of even shedding His own blood. And what's truly amazing is the Scripture reveals to us, as we saw last week, that this love of Christ to go to the cross for His people was not motivated by any external motivation. It was motivated by His own character, His own will.

We saw that in Titus last week, but it's also here in Ephesians chapter one. Ephesians 1:3: *"3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, (Listen to this) according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace,"*

What was it that motivated Him? What motivated this love in which He chose to set His love on us? It was the kind intention of His will. It was His own will. It was an internal motivation of God that led Him to love us in this way to the point of going all the way to the cross. He loved us. He saved us, as we saw last week.

Now obviously the cross, as we said, is the ultimate demonstration of that sacrificial love. But what we have to understand also men is that Christ didn't simply die for the church but all throughout His earthly ministry He lived for her sacrificially. Mark 10:45 says: *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

He came to serve. The love of Christ overflowed onto sinful men and sinful women day in and day out as He taught them and He fed them and He healed them and He prayed for them and He cared for their needs day in and day out. Now obviously that culminates into this phrase that *He gave up Himself for her*. This giving up of Himself was voluntary, on purpose, a willful choice as He declared in John 10 that it would be this way. John 10:17:

"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. ¹⁸ No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

So men, the gospel is to transform you and I and one of the key fruits of that transformation is the sacrificial love of our wives. A love that is lavished upon them by choice on their best day and on their worst. A love that causes us to take up the mantle of Christ as we think about our position of authority and not use our authority for our own selfish gain and our own selfish benefit but for the benefit of our wife and our children. The gospel transforms our love so that it saturates us with selfless service in the home seeking to meet her needs and her preferences prioritizing herself over ourselves as Philippians 2:3-4 commands.

So our love is to be sacrificial but there's a second aspect of Christ's love for the church that ought to inform the way we love our wives. Aspect number two is **A Sanctifying Love**. A sanctifying love.

Why did He give Himself up for the church? Verse 26:

"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."

Now it's important to note guys this is not a description of what we're able to do for our wives this is primarily a description of what Christ does for His church. It describes on the one hand that Christ has already done this it speaks of it in the past tense *having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word* and yet also there's a present tense reality as He continues to sanctify the church day in and day out.

But the point is the gospel is transformative. Christ saved us, He gave up Himself to make us holy to bring a bride to Himself that's perfectly washed without spot or wrinkle and that applies to both the husband and the wife as we are both members of the body of Christ. This is the end goal, the bride's perfection, the bride's holiness. It's interesting that Christ does all the work notice: He cleanses her by the washing of water with the word and it's He who presents her to Himself. He redeems the bride, He sanctifies the bride, He will bring the bride to be with Him that He might live with her forever.

Now men we have to acknowledge that we are powerless to sanctify our wives. We're powerless to sanctify ourselves. That's the divine work of God alone. But the fact that this is here informs us of some aspect of how our love should reflect this sanctifying desire. If the great goal of Christ for His bride is her holiness then the great goal of a Christian husband is to see holiness formed in himself and formed in his bride.

We are to love our wives in a way that leads them to holiness. We can't make them holy but we ought to lead in such a way that holiness is attractive, that propels them towards it. After all what was Adam's great sin in the garden beyond of course eating of the fruit itself that was the primary sin, but prior to that what happened? What did Adam do when Eve was tempted? It says that she takes of the fruit and gives to her husband with her.

The idea is that he was there, he listened, he stood by while his wife was tempted and he said nothing to protect her from this sin. The gospel is to transform the love of a husband now to where we care about her holiness and her protection. We don't desire to see ourselves or her walk in sin and so we lead our family to the truth and we stand up to protect our family from sin and its influence.

It transforms our leadership. He says He washes his bride with the word. I think in context as he speaks of that in past tense this is the initial preaching of the gospel that it goes forth, there's regeneration of the spirit the effectual call through the gospel in that sense we're washed with the word at salvation.

But it's clear throughout Scripture that we're continually washed with the word as the word is the means the Holy Spirit uses to sanctify His people. John 1: 17 in the high priestly prayer of Christ He prays for His disciples:

"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

And so the word of God is the means by which we are sanctified as husbands and by which we seek to lead our wives that they might be sanctified through the truth.

But the Bible's also clear that godly leadership is to be a kind of leadership that's characterized by personal example. And I want you to see this in a passage it's actually written to elders and how they are to shepherd the church but there's a principle here of leadership that we can apply even to our homes.

1 Peter 5:2-3:

"2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock."

This is a principle of loving leadership. Godly leadership is not characterized by us standing over our wives and our children simply barking out orders, standing on our pedestal above them. It is to follow our Lord who got up from the table and took on a towel and began to wash the feet of His disciples. We get down off the pedestal and we lead by example that they can follow in our wake. We make the gospel attractive by our own personal pursuit of obedience.

That means we have to be men who are busy putting sin to death. Men who love the word of God who live the word of God. If holiness is Christ's goal for His church then it must be our primary occupation men. No matter what you do for a paycheck every day that is not your primary aim in life. Your primary aim in life is the glory of Christ to live for Him and to be conformed to His image and as you do that with every ounce of your being you lead with love and you provide an environment that is conducive for the others in the household to want to follow after Christ themselves.

If you want to lead your wife towards holiness then lead her by modeling humility. Lead her by modeling repentance. Lead her by modeling love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness and self-control. Lead her by being a man who is gripped and controlled by the fear of God, that the holiness of God and the reverence of God has a hold on you, and you hate sin because of it. Live as a man who has a reverence for God's word, who trembles at the word of God, who cherishes it.

Oftentimes men, especially in our circles, boil down spiritual leadership in the home to the frequency with which they have some kind of family devotion. Reading the Bible to the kids

and the wife, don't get me wrong, that's a sweet time. It's important to instruct our kids and even in our marriage to instruct one another in the truth of Scripture. But men, that's not what Paul's commanding us to do here. Instead, he's saying that our daily thoughts, words and actions are to be characterized by sacrificial love and a desperate desire to see the character of Christ formed in us and in our wives.

And far too many men read the Bible consistently to their wives and their children and call them to obey it only to spend the rest of the time in the home undermining what they've taught by their pride, and their short temper, and their lack of self-control. And men, God would much rather you skip the formal family devotion time and live as a godly man in your house.

A trained unbeliever can lead a Bible study. That's not primarily what will change your family. You want to lead your family to godliness, be a godly man. That is priority number one.

The gospel changes everything. So ask yourself this hard question, men. Is your wife's spiritual growth in Christ hindered or propelled by the fact that you're her husband? Is her spiritual growth hindered or propelled by the fact that you are her husband? You can't make her holy, but you can sure make godliness look attractive as you put on Christ and put sin to death.

Now these are things that are not possible for us as husbands or wives apart from the work of Christ. We have to humbly say the only way that our marriages will reflect the purpose of God is if God does a work in us. And so that is where we must remain in our dependence upon Him, throwing ourselves on Christ and His word, pursuing Him day in and day out.

But as God does His work through us, the gospel transformation that takes place on a daily basis, then and only then will our marriages become like that diamond ring that shines the gospel to the world, drawing attention to the diamond of Christ.

Now next time we're going to pick up in verse 28 and continue on in this passage, but I want to take some time now and I want to encourage us in some key applications. These are not rocket science, they're drawn directly from the passage we've just read, but let me speak first to wives.

And wives, let me encourage you to **Evaluate Your Submission**. And just ask yourself, has your love for Christ been your motivation for willingly submitting to your husband's authority? When you struggle to submit to something your husband asks of you, how quickly do you turn your heart and mind to Christ? Is Christ the standard and the motivation? Are you only willing to follow your husband's lead if his ideas make sense to you or they match your own personal preferences? Are you willing to humble yourself as the church is to humbly follow the leadership of Christ and follow him out of your love for your Savior?

In short, a way to think about it is how much time have you spent considering how much the gospel should impact you as a wife? So here's your assignment, ladies. Spend some intentional time this week reviewing the verses that we've studied and compare the current

state of your submission as a wife to what we've learned. And what you're asking yourself is, how could I more faithfully make the gospel shine through my humble and joyful submission?

Husbands, in the same vein, **Evaluate Your Love** this week, today. Can you honestly say that you love your wife sacrificially? Would your wife be able to say honestly that you give yourself up for her on a daily basis? Do you lay aside your preferences for her? Do you serve her in the home? Do you invite her opinions and value her insights without objecting to them? In what ways does your love encourage your wife in her sanctification? Would your wife say that my husband's most ardent pursuit is godliness? All I have to do is I follow his lead and it leads me to want to be more godly myself. That should be our aim. Do you pray for your wife's sanctification?

Since we can't do that work for ourselves or for her, do you pray for that? One of my seminary professors challenged us on that in class and it struck me. It's pretty intuitive. Should have thought of it. But ever since then, yes, I should be praying actively for my wife's sanctification. And men, not for our own benefit. Not praying that she's sanctified in one particular way that's really irritating. Praying for her benefit, that she'd be sanctified and conformed to the image of Christ for her good, for His glory.

Is your love for your wife given an accurate picture of Christ's love for the church? If the world looked at you and said that's how Christ loves the church, how accurate would that be? So the assignment for you is the same. Spend some intentional time this week reviewing the verses we've studied and compare the current state of your love as a husband to what we've learned. How can you make the gospel shine through your sacrificial love?

Now, I also have some extra credit. If you want to go above and beyond, here's some extra credit for you as a couple. If you really want to grow in these things, then block out at least an hour of time this week and sit down together with your spouse and ask them for their honest feedback on how you could be more like Christ in fulfilling your role in marriage.

And if you do this, commit to give one another true but loving input. The goal of this is to build one another up in Christ, not to tear one another down. And so I'm going to encourage you, if you do this, avoid hyperbole. Avoid things like you always or you never. Those things are inflammatory and they block communication. Don't interrupt each other or speak over each other. Just humbly listen as the other one speaks. Ask questions, but not questions to defend yourself and prove why you're right and he or she is wrong, but ask questions to truly gain understanding of what's being communicated to you. And then, whatever's revealed, any area of sin or weakness, confess that and seek by God's grace to forsake it and then close out that time together in prayer.

Listen, these things are possible in and through Christ and what He's done for us, but it begins by us humbling ourselves and admitting that we need the help of God, that His way is better, and that to walk in the glory of Christ, we need to walk in obedience to what He commands.

And if you go through this process and you realize that, you know what, my marriage doesn't look anything like this chapter and it's because perhaps, maybe I'm not even in Christ. Start there. Start there, because without a relationship with Christ, without repenting of your sins and putting your faith in Christ, all of us are hopeless of these things. But there's forgiveness in Christ if you humbly return to him. The gospel truly transforms marriage because it transforms husbands and wives. Amen?

Let's pray together. Lord God, we are so thankful that the gospel is transformative. Whatever state our marriage is in right now, it is not beyond Your reach. It's not beyond hope. There's eternal hope in Christ. God, I pray for every marriage in the room.

I pray for every husband, that You would help them to take seriously the role of leadership You've given them and that their love would be the umbrella that covers the home, that Christ-like love would exude from them towards their wife and children.

And we pray for every wife, that You would help them by Your grace to willingly submit to the authority of their husbands as they submit to the authority of Christ. We're grateful that You've not left us to our own devices, but You give us Your Spirit and Your word to not only guide us but equip us to do these things in increasing measure.

And we ask for your help. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.