

February 12, 1999
Cornerstone Bible Fellowship

A Job Description for Husbands
Ephesians 5:25-33

Kids sometimes have some funny insights on things like love and marriage. When asked, "How does a person decide who to marry?" Allan (age 10) said, "You got to find somebody who likes the same stuff. Like if you like sports, she should like it that you like sports, and she should keep the chips and dip coming." Kirsten (age 10) replied, "No person really decides before they grow up who they're going to marry. God decides it all way before, and you got to find out later who you're stuck with." (A Calvinist in the making!)

What do most people do on a date? Lynnette (age 8) says, "Dates are for having fun, and people should use them to get to know each other. Even boys have something to say if you listen long enough." Martin (age 10) has some youthful wisdom: "On the first date, they just tell each other lies, and that usually gets them interested enough to go for a second date."

Is it better to be single or married? Anita (age 9) says, "It's better for girls to be single but not for boys. Boys need somebody to clean up after them!" Kenny (age 7) says, "It gives me a headache to think about that stuff. I'm just a kid. I don't need that kind of trouble."

Why love happens between two people: Jan (age 9) says, "No one is sure why it happens, but I heard it has something to do with how you smell. That's why perfume and deodorant are so popular." Harlen (age 8) says, "I think you're supposed to get shot with an arrow or something, but the rest of it isn't supposed to be so painful."

What is falling in love like? Roger (age 9) says, "Like an avalanche where you have to run for your life." Greg (age 8) says, "Love is the most important thing in the world, but baseball is pretty good too."

When is it okay to kiss someone? Pam (age 7) says, "When they're rich!" Curt (age 7) is more cautious: "The law says you

have to be 18, so I wouldn't mess with that." Howard (age 8) is a bit more responsible: "The rule goes like this: If you kiss someone, then you should marry them and have kids with them. It's the right thing to do." Jean (age 10) says, "It's never okay to kiss a boy. They always slobber all over you. That's why I stopped doing it."

How to make a marriage work: Ricky (age 7) says, "Tell your wife that she looks pretty even if she looks like a truck!" Bobby (age 9) says, "Be a good kisser. It might make your wife forget that you never take out the trash." Roger (age 8) says, "Don't forget your wife's name. That will mess up the love."

How would the world be different if people didn't get married? Kevin (age 8) says, "There sure would be a lot of kids to explain, wouldn't there?"

Twenty-five years ago next month, my bride and I exchanged our wedding vows of lifelong commitment to one another. Over the past quarter century together (22 years of which I've been a pastor), we've watched with sadness as the marriages of many friends and acquaintances have hit the skids. While each couple is unique, I've noticed some common errors that have led to divorce.

I'm going to pick on the men tonight because one of the most common problems I've encountered is the passive husband (passive is a nice way of saying "wimp"). The problem of relationally impaired men is so widespread that humorists poke fun at it. Dave Barry tells about the guy and girl who have "a relationship" going. One night as they're sitting in the car, she dreamily looks over at him and says, "Did you know that today is the six-month anniversary of when we started going together?" He's thinking, "Six months! Has it been six months? I can't believe it! I've got to get the oil changed on this car!"

That story is fiction, but I read a true story of a guy who, on his 18th anniversary, played a round of golf. His wife waited patiently and then they went out to dinner. As they ate, they talked about the memories of the years. Then his wife said, "Want to go for another 18?" "No," he replied, "I think it's too dark now."

Whether such a man is well-meaning or not, the fact is, he is neglecting the biblical command addressed to the husband: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and

gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Biblical love isn't a passive feeling that overwhelms you when you see a beautiful young woman and get swept off your feet. It's not something you activate on your wedding day and let it run on auto-pilot. Biblical love is an *active, self-sacrificing commitment to seek the highest good of the one loved*. This commandment means that ...

The husband must take responsibility
for sacrificially loving his wife.

I'd like to briefly explore four aspects of this command:

1. This command implies that we focus on our responsibilities, not on our rights.

We live in a society that is consumed with rights and it would be naïve to think that this does not spill over into Christian marriages. Invariably when couples come to me for counsel, he's blaming her for not meeting his needs or for her constant nagging, and she's blaming him for not meeting her needs and for his anger or the lack of attention that he shows her. My first task is to get each of them to focus on what God says to each partner.

If you ask most men, "What does God command the husband?" he will reply, "To be the head of my home." Wrong! The Bible never gives that command to the husband. Paul states, in addressing the wives, the *fact* that the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church (5:23). But he never commands the husband to be the head. It's a fact. This means that the husband is inescapably the leader, whether he likes it or not. He may be a very weak leader. He may abdicate his leadership and create many problems in doing so. He may botch up his leadership by insensitively barking orders at his wife and children. But the headship of the husband, according to Scripture, is not an option; it is a fact.

This means that the husband is responsible for the direction his marriage and family life goes. If his wife or his children are having problems, he dare not say, "It's not my problem," because clearly it *is* his problem! If a captain of a ship is asleep at night when a seaman apprentice runs the ship aground, the admiral will call the captain on the carpet, because he is responsible for that ship. He can't get off the hook by blaming the seaman. And the

husband can't get off the hook by blaming his wife and kids. He must answer to God for the direction of the family.

Establishing this biblical fact at the outset is important because part of the job of a leader is to deal with problems. A lot of husbands have the mentality, "I work hard at my job every day. When I come home, I want some peace and quiet. I don't want to deal with problems." He wants to read the paper, eat a good dinner, watch some TV, and perhaps have a little amorous time with his wife before he drifts off to sleep. He doesn't want to hear about problems with the kids or with finances. He doesn't want to hear about the clogged drain or the wife's hectic day. If she brings up a problem, his standard reply is, "Do whatever you think is best, dear." He thinks that this is an agreeable reply. He can't understand why his wife seems so frustrated and unhappy. He's trying to buy himself some peace by not dealing with problems. But he's not focusing on his responsibility as leader of the family; he's focused on what he thinks is his right to some peace and quiet.

Jacob is a classic illustration of this. He ends up with two wives, one of whom he didn't want in the first place. Leah, the unwanted wife, is the more fertile of the two, whereas Rachel, the wife he loved, was barren. So Rachel gave Jacob her maiden to have children through her. Not to be outdone, Leah gave him her maiden, and the war of the wives was on. A godly husband should have seen what was happening and given the family some instruction on how to be a godly family. But Jacob just ran for cover out in the fields, away from the battlefield. When Rachel complained to him about her not being able to conceive, he didn't instruct her about God's providence and the need to trust in God. He didn't listen and then pray with her. Instead, he got angry and defensive. When Leah caught him coming in from the field and told him that she had hired him for the night with her son's mandrakes, in effect he said, "Whatever you say, dear." Jacob's wives needed godly leadership, but he was a passive wimp!

So, rather than focusing on what you think is your right to some peace and quiet, you must focus on your responsibility to give godly leadership to your family. This implies, of course, that *you* are walking with God every day and growing in your understanding of His Word so that you can give such leadership. A lot

of Christian husbands think that Bible study is the wife's thing, but he's not into that. As a result, she knows far more of the Word than he does. But if you're not having a consistent, regular time in God's Word and in prayer, you are not equipped to lead your family in the things of God. So start there if need be.

Many husbands hear that they are responsible as the head of their wives and go home and start barking orders military fashion. But, they aren't paying attention to what Paul says about *how* we are to exercise this responsibility:

2. This command requires careful thought and deliberate, determinative action.

The way to exercise your headship is by loving your wife just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. That kind of self-sacrificing love does not happen automatically because, by nature, we all are selfish. Paul doesn't mean that a husband must be willing to die literally to protect his wife, although he should be willing to do that. He's talking about the need for daily death to self and living with his wife's highest good as his constant focus and prayer. This requires listening to her so that he can discover her needs, her problems, and the areas where she needs to grow spiritually. 1 Peter 3:7 tells us that husbands are to live with their wives "according to knowledge," which implies taking the time and effort to get to know her on a deep level, not just superficially.

Shortly after Ray Perkins took over as head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers football team, someone asked him if his wife objected to his 18-hour workdays. He replied, "I don't know. I don't see her that much." I don't know if they're still married, but clearly he wasn't obeying the biblical command!

Paul's command also requires some careful thought and deliberate, determinative action because it is goal-oriented. Christ loved the church "that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless." While not all of this applies directly to husbands, the overall thrust of it does, namely, that your goal is to see your wife become a godly, Christ-like woman.

These verses imply that you are teaching her from God's Word, which again implies that you are learning it for yourself. They imply that you know the characteristics of biblical love and that you are growing in your practice of them: "Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (1 Cor. 13:4-8a). This leads to the third implication:

3. This command requires that a husband establish and maintain a climate of love in his home.

Paul tells the husband to nourish and cherish his wife, even as he does his own body, since she is one flesh with him. If a man is working out in the garage and smashes his finger with a hammer, he doesn't yell, "You stupid finger!" and grab the saw and cut it off. He tenderly nurses that sore finger back to health, taking whatever time and effort it takes to do it.

Nourish means to feed and implies that just as a husband feeds his own physical body, so he must feed his wife on every level—physically, through adequate financial provision; emotionally, through being sensitive to her feelings; and, spiritually, through his own walk with God and his loving spiritual nurture of her. *Cherish* has the nuance of warmth. It is used of a mother tenderly holding her baby close to her body. It connotes the utmost in tender loving care. The callous words, "I couldn't care less," should never cross a husband's lips.

This tender loving care also implies that a man must use words that build up and encourage and never use words that tear down. As Paul states in Eph. 4:29, "Let no rotten word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for building up according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear."

Marla and I once went to a pastor's retreat. We had just checked into our room when we could hear the couple in the next room yelling at each other. He called her stupid and ugly and she blasted him with awful name-calling. We couldn't avoid hearing

them since they were yelling so loudly. I looked at Marla and said, "I'll bet they're rehearsing for a skit that will be put on later tonight." But there was no skit. This was a real, live fight between a pastor and his wife. I can't imagine how that man can stand in the pulpit and teach people about how to have loving relationships! How could his wife sit there and listen to him? That sort of angry, abusive speech is the opposite of biblical love.

Paul's command puts the burden on the husband to establish and maintain a climate of love in the home. If there are misunderstandings or conflicts that need to be resolved, he should lead his wife in discussing them in a godly manner, under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The same applies when children come into the home. The sweet fragrance of Christ as expressed through encouraging, uplifting words should hang in the air of Christian homes. This leads to a final implication:

4. The goal of this command is the glory of Jesus Christ; happiness for the couple is the by-product.

After spending 10 verses talking about marriage and after just stating that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh, Paul states, "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church" (5:32). I've always read that verse and thought, "That's funny; I thought he was talking about marriage!" But I think what he's getting at is that a Christian marriage is the closest earthly picture we have of the spiritual relationship between Jesus Christ and His bride, the church. This means that the world should be able to look at a Christian home and smell the sweet fragrance of the Lord Jesus. He should be exalted through our marriages.

As you probably know, the Puritans began the Westminster Shorter Catechism with the question, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Even so, the chief end of Christian marriage isn't to make us happy, although a godly marriage is a source of great joy. But our focus should be on the glory of God. A husband should commit himself daily to love his wife, not so that they will be happy, but so that the Lord will be pleased and glorified through that couple's relationship. As God uses your marriage to

shine in the moral and cultural darkness around us, you will have great joy as the by-product of your obedience to God.

Conclusion

Humorist Sam Levenson says, "Love at first sight is easy to understand. It's when two people have been looking at each other for years that it becomes a miracle." But it's not really a miracle. It's a result of the deliberate choice to live in obedience to God and actively to love your wife as He commands. I encourage each husband to take a few minutes every day to ask yourself the question, "How can I actively love my wife today as Christ loved the church?" The answer for that day may be as simple as taking the time to listen to her concerns and to pray with her. It may mean taking the initiative to help her deal with household or family problems. It may mean reading the Bible together or taking a walk and talking. As you do it to please God, He will bless you with a joyous marriage.