

Christian Families (3) – Husbands (Kisumu Conference 2010) – Ephesians 5:22-33

This passage is the Bible's clearest teaching about the duties of husbands and wives. We will take it in four parts: 1) The duty of love, 2) The standard of love, 3) The reason for love, 4) The goal of love.

The duty of love

Love and authority: Paul tells wives to submit to their husbands. This implies that husbands are to exercise authority over their wives. But Paul does not then say “and you husbands, make sure you exercise authority over your wives.” Instead, he tells husbands to love their wives. It is not our work to spend time looking at our authority. Instead, it is our work to use our position to love our wives. Do you understand this important difference? You can see the same with children and parents in 6:1-4. Paul tells children to obey their fathers (v1)... but he then tells fathers to be gentle with their children (v4). There is authority, which must be used very carefully. It is to be used to love. This is how Jesus used his authority. He did not see his equality with God as something to be held on to and insisted upon. Instead, he became a servant, and went to the cross (Philippians 2:1-12).

What is love? According to the Bible, love is when you give yourself for someone else. It is when you ignore your own desires, and do what helps someone else. John wrote, “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 John 5:17-18). Jesus Christ loved his church, and gave himself for her at Calvary. Love is not just a feeling, a desire or an intention. It involves costly giving of oneself.

The standard of love

How much must we love our wives? How far must we give? In our country, people have often told me that people believe they love their wives because they give them a home and bread on the table. This means they love their wives at least as much as they love their animals – I think people look after their dogs at least this well!

Paul says that there is a standard set for us. We are to love our wives just as Jesus Christ loved the church, and died for it. In other words, we are to give everything – absolutely everything that will do good to our wives. There are no limits on our duties. We can never – ever – say, “I have given enough; I have done all that I should; I have gone far enough and can now stop.” There are no excuses; we must always “go the extra mile” in any problem for our wives, because that is what Christ does for us.

Does Christ abuse and beat us when we do wrong? No? Then we should not do that to our wives. Does Christ grow bitter and send us away if we continue with the same faults? No? Then we should not do that to our wives. Is Christ mostly absent from us, doing something more important; perhaps only to be found in a different town to where we are? Neither should we be absent in that way from our wives. Does Christ lose interest in his church, and instead go looking at how to find another people for himself? So should we not either. Christ puts the church first; we must put our wives first.

As preachers, we speak to the world about the gospel, and how Christ loves his people. As husbands, we show the world what we mean by that. Our words are empty – hypocritical – if we speak about love but practice harshness. Paul tells us that it is loving our *wives* – not our parents, work colleagues, or friends – that demonstrate the gospel to the world.

The reason for love

A husband and wife are “one flesh” before God (v31). Marriage is a union – this is what we learnt yesterday. Paul also quotes from Genesis 2:24 in verse 31, just as Jesus did in Matthew 19. So Paul says in verse 28 that if we love our wives, then really we are just loving ourselves. We have, since birth, taken care of ourselves – clothing ourselves, feeding ourselves, protecting ourselves, giving ourselves sleep, taking medicines, etcetera. We do not try to annoy ourselves, or make ourselves do things we hate without very good reasons. We do this day after day, after day.

If our wives are “one flesh” with us, then therefore we must do all this (and more) for our wives too. This was a very easy teaching for Adam to understand. Eve had been made out of one of his ribs (Genesis 2:21-23). If he sent her away, he sent himself away! If he abused or forgot her, he abused and

forgot himself! When Adam sinned and then spoke about Eve as “the woman whom you gave me” (Genesis 3:12), he did not speak well. The truth was that she was “bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh”, not just “that woman”. In a game of football, if the players on one side start fighting against each other, then that side has fallen apart and will lose. How then can we look at our wives as if they were foreign to us? How can we blame them and complain about them, instead of trying to build them up and encourage them? When we bring them down, who are we bringing down? Ourselves! This is foolishness, and we need to repent of it. It is worldly thinking that makes us say “she did this, she did that”, as if it was nothing to do with us. A coach must take responsibility for his team; much more a husband must take responsibility for his wife.

This loving care is what Jesus does for the church. The church is the body of Christ. It is joined to him by a wonderful, incomprehensible union. He is the head, and she is the body. He therefore cares for the church in a very special way. He took all the church's sins upon himself. He did not stay away, and point the finger of blame. He came and carried the whole load until there was nothing left.

The goal of love

What was Christ's aim in loving his church? What is he trying to do for her now? Verse 26 tells us that Christ desired to make the church holy and pure. He washes her by his word. It is a tender duty of care.

It is a totally comprehensive duty of care. He aims to bring his church to glory (v27), with no stains or wrinkles at all, but faultless and majestic. This cannot be done quickly or easily or carelessly! This is especially hard when we consider how slow, dull and awkward we are. The church is so full of impurity and imperfection. Yet Christ perseveres with us, because he sees the goal.

Do you “see the goal” in your marriage? The goal is not to have grand-children. The goal is to see your wife reach her full potential in Christ. It is to see her reach maturity and fruitfulness. It is to see everything in her being perfectly pleasing to the Saviour. This will not be easy. It will need a lot of time – nothing of this sort is done quickly. It will need a lot of patience, and a lot of prayer. It is a goal that we will never finish in this life. There is always work to be done. We must keep giving ourselves, and keep giving ourselves – anything else is being unfaithful to Jesus.

Conclusion

Jesus calls us to love our wives, and has himself shown us what this love means. He has given us reasons to do it. Do we dare to ignore what he wants? Do we dare to settle for something less? We may have failed very much so far. But because of the gospel and the death of Jesus, we can look forward again. Our communities may think that we have gone mad, and other men may worry if they see us doing “too much” for our wives. We must please God, not men!