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What's a Man
to Do?

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WHAT'S A MAN TO DO?

Husbands, ~~love~~ wives . . .
Ephesians 5:25

Complexity is the rule in human relationships. When things are going well between, let's say, parents and children, it is because a host of little relationships are healthy. All sorts of things contribute the satisfactory quality of what goes on in the family.

The same is true when things go well between a husband and wife. When this is the case, it's because husband and wife are able to handle a hundred little things well each day-the way they act at breakfast is as important as the way they act in the bedroom. Everything they do is interrelated.

Complexity is also the rule whenever anything falls apart. Let's limit our discussion mainly to marriage today. Why does a marriage go sour? Who's to blame? Well, both parties are. What did they do? All sorts of things, actually-not just one thing here or there but a host of little things, little annoying mistakes-and over a period of time, everything accumulated into a mass of hurt and confusion.

Because human relationships are so

complex, whenever things go wrong in marriage, we have to try to figure out who is the key to putting things back together again. Who is the key person? Marriage counselors will tell you that usually marriages are something like safety deposit boxes, which have two keys. You go to the bank with your key, put it together with the key the safety deposit box person has, and you can open your box. Marriage is something like that. When things are going well, both husband and wife can be congratulated for all the things they are doing right-both of them are a key to the success of the marriage. And when things are going badly, both are usually to blame; both also, however, are keys for getting things straightened out again.

Now, even though both partners are responsible for making a marriage work, I think the Bible would lead us to conclude that the husband is the main key. I say this because the moral directives found in the Bible are addressed first of all to men, to husbands. And they are not addressed to men because women and children are exempt from the responsibility of doing the will of God but because men-husbands in this instance-are in a position to exert extremely important influence within marriage, the family, and society.

In last week's message, "The Male Factor," we saw how responsibility and male-ness go together in the Bible. We also noticed that the Bible tells men to love their wives and that it omits telling wives to love their husbands. Once again, it is important to understand that this is done not because women do not have to love their husbands; it is done because men have the primary responsibility here. If they love, the chances that the marriage will be healthy and strong are very great. If a man loves his wife, as the Bible commands him to, even if the marriage goes through a period of stress, the marriage's possibility of survival is very great.

When we analyze the Bible's entire message about men and their roles, we see what men should do in terms of their responsibility to love. Last week, we saw that the male factor is the responsibility factor. This week, we will discuss more specifically what the responsibility of males is. Basically, that responsibility is to love.

Now, this is something of a switch from our usual description of the male role and masculinity. We tend to think about pressing love as a feminine thing. The reason for this is that women in general seem to be more loving than men.

Take the matter of child care, which takes a lot of love. We still usually associate child care with mothers and mother love. Surely, there are many reasons to associate love with women. It's even possible that one of the reasons the Bible does not specifically tell women to love their husbands is that women love more easily, more naturally, and that they need not be told.

Husbands, however, are called to love their wives. And I believe that as we study this fundamental calling, we will be able to understand the masculine role in society better. I want to explore this by showing first of all how we must think about love if we are to understand man's role, then how a man can love as God wants him to, then how good results will follow if more men realize that God wants them to love.

What does it mean to be a man? What is he to do with his life? These are questions that all men must ask. Actually, women must ask themselves similar questions, for they can be exceedingly influential in men's lives. Men need women to help them, to point them the way, and to provide them examples. What's a man to do? Why, a man must love.

This can be inferred from the way God's commandments are directed toward

males in society -the Ten Commandments, for example, conclude by telling men that they should not covet their neighbors' wives. Clearly, those commandments, without excluding women, are addressed to men as the shapers of society, the family, and marriage. And those commandments are to be fulfilled in terms of love. Jesus used an Old Testament formula to capture the law's central thrust: *You must love God with all your being*, He said, *and you must love your neighbor as yourself*. The early church understood the importance of love, as declared by the apostle Paul: "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10).

Let's look now at how husbands are addressed in Ephesians 5. Some of this may startle you a bit, but how we put the entire picture together, it will all make sense:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in every thing.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave

himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery-but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (5:22-33).

There is much to say about this passage, but, for now, let's underscore man's great responsibility to express love. To begin we must remind one another of the special meaning love has in the Bible-it is quite different from what we usually think about today when we think about love.

The love that we find in the-Bible is the

unselfish care a person has for another. When husbands are told in Ephesians 5 to love their wives, they are told to view their own lives as lives of service to their wives. The ultimate illustration of Jesus Christ loving His church is used to drive the point home. Husbands are told to love their wives just as Christ loves the church.

If you are not very familiar with the Bible, this may not impress you much. But notice that Ephesians 5 tells us that Christ gave Himself for the church, made His church holy, cleansed it, and presented it to Himself as something that was radiant and glorious. Christ loved the church as He loved Himself. Similarly, a husband, when he loves his wife, gives her the same attention he gives himself. As he cares for his own body and keeps it well fed and well rested and clean, so, too, he cares for his wife. He cares for her on the emotional level also.

So we see what love is, according to the Bible. It contrasts almost entirely with what is commonly called love these days. The common definition of love is essentially selfish: people love people who give them a thrill, who satisfy their feelings and desires. Love is usually defined in sexual terms today. When the Bible tells us that God loves us, it means that He

cares for us; when it tells us that Christ loves His church, it means that He cares for it; and when it tells the husband to love his wife, it means that he must care for his wife.

Perhaps one of the reasons the Bible tells us this is that man, by virtue of his maleness, has a unique ability to care for his wife. Now, please don't misunderstand. I know most certainly that men need the care that their wives give them. In fact, there is biblical reason to say that a man needs a wife if he is to be fulfilled. But it is also true that wives, especially at certain times in their lives, need the care that only their husbands can give them.

During their childbearing and child rearing years, women need the protection and care of their husbands. 1 Peter 3:7 takes the biblical viewpoint a bit further: "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." Why are wives referred to as weaker than their husbands? One reason, surely, is that women do go through times when they can be physically and emotionally vulnerable. When carrying children, they need their husbands in a

special way. They also need their husbands as they care for their children. And even nowadays, when women live far beyond their child-rearing years, when they are stronger physically than they once were, there is reason to believe that they continue to need their husbands' care. One indication of this continuing need is that today the fastest growing poverty class is that of women who have been abandoned by their husbands. In general, wives simply need their husbands' selfish care.

Yes, a man is responsible to love his wife. Loving one's wife involves being united with her in loving care for one's children. This principle obligates all men to maintain conditions in society in which faithfulness in marriage can be safeguarded. Loving one's wife obligates a man to do all he can to insure his wife's fullest personal development. He must do all he can to make her radiant, just as Christ makes His church radiant.

Now, how can a man love as God wants him to love? He must love as Christ loved. Well, how can he do that?

A man can love as Christ loved only if he believes in Christ. This is essential. Thousands of marriages collapse because the husbands reach a point at which they

don't like something about their wives and then lose interest in them. Maybe the wife is no longer as physically attractive as she once was and this causes the husband to lose interest. Such a husband is selfish. He wants to be satisfied himself and really doesn't care about the way his wife feels. This happens all the time. A husband must recognize that he must care for his wife. And this is what love is. He must care for her as he cares for himself.

Now, the one thing a husband needs more than anything else in all the world is the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. If you are a husband, you can be sure that Jesus wants you to come to Him in faith. This is why you are reading this message right now. Jesus wants you to believe in Him. He will save you if you accept Him, and that means He will enable you to be a loving person. He will change you from the selfish person you are by nature into the loving person you can be through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Come to Jesus. Confess your sins and ask Him to save you. If you come to Jesus, you will first be forgiven of your sins. If you are a husband, possibly you have been unfaithful to your wife. God will forgive you, if you ask Him to. Possibly you indulge your appetites in reckless dis-

regard of your wife's needs. Possibly you don't care too much. Possibly you treat your wife like an old shoe. Possibly you take her for granted. You may even beat her up. Perhaps you have to confess that you have failed your wife miserably. Confess it to God and ask Him to forgive you through the blood of Jesus. Jesus Christ shed His blood to purchase forgiveness for our disgusting sins. When you come to Christ and confess your sins, He will forgive you. If you have sinned against your wife, you can ask her to forgive you too.

The second thing that will happen if you come to Christ is that He will send His Holy Spirit into your heart and make it possible for you to love your wife as He has loved the church. Christ gave Himself totally for the church. He died for it. Talk about sacrifice! Sometimes a man has to sacrifice, too, if he is going to love his wife as he should. Who of us can do this on his own? None. We are all too selfish. Only when Christ's Holy Spirit comes into our hearts can we begin to love as God calls us to love. Through faith, men who love Christ and who are loved by Christ and who love others in Christ's name can change everything for the good.

Think now about what would happen if more men started loving as Christ loves.

all men-husbands, fathers, and others became Christlike, became caring and loving, all sorts of things would change. Men understood their responsibility to love, and in the power of God's Holy Spirit began to love more and more, it would be as if a breath of fresh air blew over our land. We would see the dawn of a new day.

Gradually all of the hideous, exploiting elements of our society would recede. The man who knew that his primary responsibility was to care lovingly for others would not become involved in anything that degrades or demeans women. Within marriage, the wife would benefit from her husband's loving and considerate attention when she went through difficult times. Her husband would develop the ability to sense her needs and would arrange his life to meet those needs. This does not mean that a husband would be his wife's slave. Not at all. His wife would help him in return. When a husband loves his wife, he loves himself, Ephesians 5 says. And wives whose husbands knew what their primary responsibility was would grow emotionally and intellectually. Thus they would be even better wives for their husbands.

Then, too, if men realized their respon-

This message, prepared by Dr. Joel Nederhood, was heard over The Back to God Hour, which is broadcast every Sunday in co-operation with the Christian Reformed Churches of America, in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia, and by shortwave throughout the world.

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