

The Christian Home

Lesson 3: The Husband's Calling: To Love as Christ Loved -- Ephesians

5:25–33; 1 Peter 3:7

On the last night of His life, in a borrowed upstairs room, Jesus did something no rabbi, no king, no head of any household in that world would have done. He stood up from supper, took off His outer robe, wrapped a towel around His waist, and knelt down on the floor in front of His own disciples to wash the road grime off their feet. It was the job of the lowest servant in the house, and the Lord of glory did it. Peter recoiled. It was unthinkable that the Master would stoop so low. But Jesus said, "I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you." If you want to know what leadership looks like in the kingdom of God, look at the man on the floor with the towel.

Keep that picture in front of you, because it is the key to everything Paul and Peter say about husbands. When the Bible calls a husband the head of his home, the very next breath tells him what kind of head to be: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." The standard is not the boss behind the big desk. The standard is the Savior on the cross and the Master on the floor. A husband's authority, such as it is, is the authority of a servant, and his crown is a towel.

We need to say this plainly, because the word "headship" has been twisted in both directions. Some have used it as a club, a religious excuse to get their own way, to demand, to dominate, even to wound, as though being the head of the home meant being its tyrant. That is a grotesque distortion of everything these verses teach. Others, reacting against the abuse, have thrown the whole thing out, as if husband and wife had no distinct callings at all. Scripture walks a different and far more beautiful road. The husband is called to lead, yes, but to lead the way Jesus leads, by laying himself down for the good of the one he loves.

So this lesson is an invitation, husbands, and a high one. You are called to love a woman the way the Son of God loved His church, to give yourself for her, to know her, to honor her, to cherish her as your own body, to treat her as a fellow heir of eternal life so that nothing, not even your prayers, is hindered by how you treat her. It is the hardest and most rewarding assignment a man can be given. And whether you are a husband, a single man preparing for this calling, or a wife watching to understand what God asks of your husband, read these verses slowly. They show us a kind of strength the world has nearly forgotten: the strength that kneels.

Group Discussion: Our culture offers men competing pictures of what it means to be the man of the house, from the passive man who abdicates and disappears, to the domineering man who rules by force or temper. Scripture offers a third picture entirely. How would you describe, in your own words, the kind of husband these passages call for, and how is he different from both the tyrant and the absent man?

Personal Reflection: Husbands, think honestly about the last time you genuinely laid something down for your wife, a preference, your pride, your comfort, your need to be right. If you are not married, think of how you tend to handle leadership in any relationship. Does the pattern of your leading look more like a servant or more like a boss?

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Study Questions

1. Paul commands, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (v. 25). Of all the things Paul could have told husbands to do, why do you think he reduces the whole calling to one word, love, and then defines that love by the cross? What does this tell us about the heart of a husband’s role?
2. Loving as Christ loved means giving yourself up. Husbands, where in your marriage are you most tempted to insist on your own way, your own comfort, or your own convenience instead of giving yourself up for your wife? Name one specific place where laying yourself down would look like Christ this week.
3. Paul says Christ gave Himself for the church “that he might sanctify her ... so that she might be holy” (vv. 26–27), and then that a husband should “nourish and cherish” his wife as Christ does the church (v. 29). What does it look like for a husband to actively help his wife flourish and grow toward Christ, rather than merely coexisting with her?
4. “Nourish” and “cherish” are warm, attentive words. Husbands, would your wife say she feels nourished and cherished by you, or neglected and taken for granted? Where has the cherishing gone quiet in your marriage, and what is one way you could revive it?
5. Peter writes, “Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way” (1 Peter 3:7). The phrase means to dwell with her according to knowledge, paying attention, learning her. Why would God specifically command a husband to know and understand his wife, and how is this an essential part of loving her well?
6. Knowing your wife is a lifelong study, not a fact you mastered at the wedding. Husbands, how well do you actually know your wife right now, her fears, her hopes, what wearies her and what gives her joy? What would it take for you to become a student of her again?
7. Peter tells husbands to show honor to the wife “as the weaker vessel” (1 Peter 3:7). Far from demeaning her, this calls the husband to a special, protective honoring of his wife. What do you think “weaker vessel” means and does not mean here, and how does showing honor reflect Christ rather than the world’s ideas of strength?
8. Showing honor is concrete: it is how a husband speaks to his wife, speaks about her to others, protects her, and treasures her. Husbands, in what specific way could you honor your wife more visibly, whether in private, in front of the children, or in front of others? Where might you be dishonoring her without realizing it?
9. Peter says the husband is to honor his wife as “a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7). Here Scripture holds together the equal worth of husband and wife (they are fellow heirs of eternal life) and the husband’s distinct calling

to lead by serving. How do equal worth and distinct roles fit together without contradiction, and what does it mean that a husband's treatment of his wife is serious enough to hinder his prayers?

10. Look back across both passages, from Christ giving Himself on the cross, to nourishing and cherishing, to living with understanding, to honoring a fellow heir of grace. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about the husband's calling that you most need to carry into your marriage or your future this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Colossians 3:19, husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them; Philippians 2:3–8, the mind of Christ who humbled Himself and took the form of a servant; John 13:1–15, Jesus washing His disciples' feet as the pattern of leadership; 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, the patient, kind, unselfish shape of real love; 1 Peter 2:21–23, Christ leaving us an example by entrusting Himself to God rather than retaliating