Ephesians 5:25-27

Jesus and His Bride

Sermon final

We are currently in our series "The Spirit Filled Household". Paul commanded the to "**be filled with the Spirit**" in **5:18**. The filling of the Spirit, then results in "**submitting to one another"** in **5:21** which then filters down into the household code of **5:22-6:9** – where wives and husbands, children and parents, servants and masters within the household are addressed. The result is a "Spirit Filled Household".

The book of Ephesians is about restoration regarding "**things in heaven and things on earth" (1:10**) that have fallen apart. We need our homes to be restored. God's plan is to restore, through Jesus, the household and put things into their proper order. Paul depicts the oneness and the distinctions of roles for husbands and wives by showing that the "oneness" in their marriage **(Gen. 2:24**) is meant to be a parable, or illustration of the oneness and distinctions between Christ and the church (**vv.31-32**). The ultimate purpose of marriage is to parabolize, to illustrate Jesus and His bride, the church. That was my first sermon on marriage – "The Glorious Mystery of Marriage".

Last week, we looked at the wife's distinct role of submission to her husband taking her cue from the church (**vv.21-24**). Paul is now careful to describe in detail the example that the husband is to follow – Jesus and His love for His bride (**vv.25-27**).

We cannot give what we have not first received…this is a very gospel centered thing that Paul does. He explains details about the kind of love the husband is to have by first highlighting the love that Jesus has for His bride, the church. Some of you may remember my sermons on love when our church began. I said over and over: **"we receive, we enjoy, and we supply the love of God in Christ unto the glory of God**". So husbands look to Christ's love for us…that we might receive it, enjoy it, and ***then supply*** it to our spouses.

Husbands: ***Pay careful attention to the "manner" in which Jesus loves His bride…because that is the example for us to emulate***. I'll highlight some of that this morning, and we'll look more at practical applications for the husbands next week in our last sermon on marriage.

Jesus Christ, the bridegroom of the church, has initiated and accomplished everything that is needed for His bride, the church, so that the church and Jesus would become "**one flesh".** All throughout Ephesians Paul has described the church as the **"body"** and the "**flesh"** of Jesus with union language. Here in this passage where the context is marriage, Paul is using

language that depicts ceremonial aspects of Jewish marriage as He describes Jesus' love for his bride:

> **Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, [26] that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, [27] so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25-27)**

This might not strike you as marriage type language. The Jewish wedding, unlike our weddings today, had two ceremonies that were separated by a period of waiting. Kiddushin and Nissuin: The first was a ceremony of betrothal called the Kiddushin. We could compare that to a modern-day proposal…but in their culture it was far more serious. To be betrothed was a legal covenant and to break that covenant had radical consequences. The second ceremony was called the Nissuin. This was the ceremony that consummated the marriage where the two would come together under the same roof and consummate the marriage physically. Between the betrothal ceremony and the consummation ceremony there was a period of waiting – the groom would prepare a place, their future home, but they did not live together yet. During this period they were married, but they didn't know one another physically (Mary and Joseph were betrothed, but had not yet known each other physically which is why it was scandalous that she was pregnant during this time). Prior to these ceremonies, the bride would be washed thoroughly so that she would be cleansed of anything that would defile. She was then presented to her groom in splendor. He would speak vows to her and through the vows she would be consecrated, set apart to him from that moment forward. These bridal baths and vows had a far deeper significance than just "taking a shower" and speaking nice words to your bride. The ceremony found its symbolic significance in the OT picture of Israel as the wife of God.

In **Ezekiel 16** (you can look closely at this passage sometime this week) Israel is depicted in a vivid way as a female baby that is cast out into an open field from the day of birth. Abandoned and left for dead, and no eye pitied her. She is cold, naked, and dirty from the blood of her birth…the umbilical cord is uncut. And God passes by her and says to her, "LIVE!". Then time goes on…and the young woman has grown. God passes by her again and spreads the corner of His garment over her (a symbol of marriage and protection from a man to a woman – Ruth requests this of Boaz). God then makes vows to her – He speaks words to her – and enters into a covenant with her. He bathes her with water and washes off her blood and anoints her with oil. He clothes her, cares for her – he nourishes and cherishes her – He adorns her with fine jewelry and places a beautiful crown on her head. And she becomes "perfect in splendor" and her renown is witnessed by all the nations around her. From passages like this

the Jewish people developed the various ceremonial rituals of washing, consecration, and vows in the marriage ceremony. Paul specifically uses much of the same language to speak of the union of the church, the body, the bride of Christ, to her groom.

In chapter 2 Paul described, the church, in our former condition prior to our union with Jesus. Just like Israel, we were that female baby… **"dead in trespasses and sins" (2:1).** We were **"walking according to the course of this world" (2:2)** and we were whoring ourselves to the devil **– "following the prince of the power of the air".** *Do you remember your condition prior to receiving Jesus?* We were **"sons of disobedience"** and living **"in the passions of our flesh", "and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." (2:3).** This is a horrific picture of who we were prior to our relationship with Jesus. But God, "**because of His great love for us**" betrothed us to His Son Jesus. **(2:4**). Jesus came and through the Holy Spirit said, "LIVE!" We were **"made alive together with Christ – by grace [we] have been saved" (2:5).** This is the kind of love God has for His people. We receive it by faith. This is the kind of love that a husband is to love his wife with. It is an **"initiating"** love. It's unconditional…it's volitional love. It doesn't wait for the wife to become lovely or to do anything at all that merits his love. There is NOTHING you could ever do to merit the love of Jesus. He has chosen to love you…and He loves you just as you are! You're His bride! He is your head – and **"headship"** implies leadership, and leadership implies initiation. God, through our groom Jesus, initiated salvation while we were **"dead" –** left for dead out in an open field.

Now be careful, this is a *metaphor*. In marriage, BOTH husband and wife are a part of the church and BOTH are broken and need grace and mercy – marriage is a training ground for grace, mercy, and forgiveness. So don't take Paul as saying, wives are the unlovely ones…and husbands are the spiritually superior ones who come and fix their wives. There are ways we mimic the love of Christ, and ways we do not. The point Paul wants to make is the "kind" or "manner" of sacrificial love Jesus has for His bride – a love that looks forward in hope to a day when the bride will be presented to Him in "**splendor**" and "**holy and blameless**".

Husbands, you may not sense the kind of "oneness" God desires for you and your bride. Your part is to commit to a sacrificial kind of love that initiates, protects, and provides for your wife that will yield the fruit of glorious, joy filled, oneness in your marriage. ***Sacrificial love is painful in the moment…but it looks forward with hope to what it will produce, a greater goal of oneness in marriage.***

Let's now consider together Christ's love for His bride in vv.25-27.

1. Christ's Payment for His Bride (v.25)

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (v.25)

When a man was betrothed to his wife, a dowry, or bridal price (like a downpayment), would be given to the wife's parents because marriage was a legal, contractual, covenant between two parties. The marriage covenant between Jesus and the church is paid for with His own blood that was shed for her. The church is now sealed with the Holy Spirit who is a guarantee of the future inheritance of the bridegroom, Jesus. The payment is seen in the words – "**as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her**". This speaks of His crucifixion: ***where Jesus took the initiative in an act of unconditional, volitional, sacrificial, self-betrayal unto death, because of His love for His bride***. This is the "kind" of love a husband is to have for his wife:

Initiating love: "**but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8**). Jesus INITIATED the love relationship…His bride was in sin and an enemy to Him. Christ died for a bride who was His enemy – I'm sure that speaks to some husbands. ***Marriage can feel like war between two people!*** Jesus won her over with the display of His sacrificial love. Again, it's unconditional - not conditioned upon the worthiness or loveliness of the bride.

Sacrificial love: Jesus also had a *particular mindset* of sacrifice**…a sacrificial love**: Jesus **"emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant…He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Phil. 2:7-8**). Husbands, it takes great obedience and sacrifice to love as Jesus loved. This has to be our mindset. Jesus' mindset was not to exalt Himself, rather it was to serve and to humble Himself for the sake of His bride, the church for whom He died.

Reconciling love: on the cross, where He was mocked and insulted, He prayed to God, **"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (Lk. 23:34**). The very people that mocked Him He prayed for their forgiveness. **"When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly." (1 Pet. 2:23**) He didn't revile back, He didn't stand up for his own rights, He did not retaliate threatening words with threats. He committed Himself to the Father knowing that He judges justly. And He prayed for His accusers initiating forgiveness and reconciliation.

This is the kind of sacrificial love displayed by Jesus for His bride, and it is the example set for us as husbands towards our wives – Headship implies leadership and "initiation". To do what? To lay down our lives for our spouses in a myriad of ways as we initiate sacrificial and reconciling love towards our wives. To be sure, the wife has an obligation to God to love this way as well…but the husband has a particular calling to "be the first"…to "initiate".

When we carefully consider the headship of Jesus, we begin to realize that "headship" has far less to do with "getting YOUR way" and much more to do with "laying down your way for the sake of another".

2. Christ's Cleansing of His Bride (v.26)

"[He gave Himself]…that he might sanctify her [the word means to consecrate, or set apart], **having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word (Ephesians 5:26)**

Some think that Paul has in mind baptism here when he writes that the church is sanctified and cleansed "**by the washing of water**", but most likely, he is referring to a bridal bath in the context of marriage. The young woman was to enter a bridal bath as a symbolic and physical means of cleansing of her impurities prior to her presentation to the groom. ***But notice in this case it is the groom who washes the bride.***

This is a beautiful picture of the cleansing and consecration of the church to be presented to her groom, Jesus. Washing of water is used everywhere in Scripture to speak of the Holy Spirit who washes us. This was a future promise to the people of Israel in Ezekiel, that ***in the latter days God would wash Israel by sprinkling her with water and the fulfillment was a rebirth of the nation through the new birth of the Holy Spirit*** (**Eze. 36:26-28).** The Gentile nations are now grafted into this promise as we partake of the blessing promised to Israel. Notice the washing of water happens "**with [or by] the word**". The word is the means by which the bride is washed and consecrated to her groom. In the betrothal ceremony, the groom would speak words to his bride, vows of consecration to her: "***Behold you are consecrated unto me, you are betrothed to me; behold you are a wife unto me according to the law of Moses and Israel***." The marriage had not yet been fully consummated…there was still a period of waiting, but at that moment the two were no longer two…but considered one through the vows proclaimed and received. Jesus washes His bride with words – gospel words proclaimed to her. Vows of a covenant sealed with His blood. It is by the gospel proclamation that we are cleansed by the Holy Spirit and consecrated unto our groom Jesus! The Word of God is the means by which we are thoroughly washed and consecrated to God!

So it is with a husband towards his wife…and a wife to her husband I might add – again this is a metaphor - but the husband initiates as the head. You are to regularly allow the word of God to wash over your lives…to consecrate you to God. Words that remind you of His love for you. Husbands, constantly, thoroughly wash your wife with the words of God! Not to prove your point…not for your sake, but for hers! Not as a weapon against her…but as a means of protection from the real enemy…the flesh and the devil. We are to protect our wives and our homes by wielding **"the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God"** (**Eph. 6:17**). Preach the gospel to her when she is tempted with words of condemnation. Preach to her God's love and

forgiveness when she feels like she falls short in life. Preach words of forgiveness, words of courage, words of hope when she is in despair. Wash her regularly with the reading of Scripture…just read it with her! This is the manner in which we are to love our wives as Christ loved the church.

There is a payment, there is a consecration…then finally…there is the presentation

3. Christ's presentation of His Bride

[all of this is for an ultimate purpose**] so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:27)**

Notice that there is a future goal in the mind of Jesus – "**so that He might present the church to Himself**" – Paul probably has in mind the final presentation of the church to Jesus in the future. So in the present time, during this church age, the church is being "**washed**", "**sanctified**" to Jesus until she is free from every "**spot or wrinkle or any such thing**". She is cleansed, and she is being cleansed. The final result being "**holy and blameless**". During the period of waiting, the groom is preparing a place for His bride - Jesus said, I go and prepare a place for you (**John 14:1-2**). The church has been "**chosen by God before the foundation of the world**" that she in the future should be presented before Him as "**holy and blameless**" (**Eph. 1:4**). The church has been reconciled to God (**2:1-10**), and reconciled to one another as He is building a mixed body of Jews and Gentiles during the church age **(2:11-3:13**). The church grows through the provisional resources of Jesus – the giftings of the church: "**apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11)** who are to equip the church (**4:12**) with everything it needs for unity, stability, and growth (**4:7-16**). While we wait we are to go forth with the vows, the words of the groom to the nations and to proclaim the gospel until the church grows to completion – when the **"fulness of the Gentiles comes in" (Romans 11:25**). We live in a period of waiting for His return for His bride – the church age - where God is primarily reaching the nations. Jesus, the groom, protects the church from every attack of the devil, and pours out everything that's needed for the church to be finally presented to Himself in splendor – Holy and blameless. And then, and only then, will His Kingdom come upon the earth.

He is preparing a place for us, and He will come and snatch the church from the hour of tribulation that is coming (**Revelation 6-19**) …and He will present us to Himself at the marriage supper of the lamb (**Rev. 19**) a church "**in splendor**"…not having any "**spot or wrinkle or any such thing**". She is perfect and complete, every individual is accounted for. She has been washed thoroughly by her groom…and she is now presented to Him as "**holy and blameless**".

In closing, a husband is to take his example from Jesus as **the head. The husband who leads takes the initiative to sacrificially provide for and protect his wife. That is what**

headship means…it means leadership, it means initiation…and the wife is to follow his lead. And we do this for the joy set before us – that's why Jesus did what He did. Jesus sacrificially loves His church in this way, for the future joy of a bride that is presented in splendor to Himself. ***Husbands, we sacrificially lay our lives down in the present (it hurts to sacrifice)…for the future joy of a marriage that is glorious. The splendor of the church did not come without sacrifice…so too, a beautiful marriage is built upon the sacrificial initiatives of the husband who consistently provides for and protects His wife (spiritually, physically, emotionally).***

How can you and I lay down our lives for our wives this week? What are some ways that the Holy Spirit is leading you to die to self…to be willing to be betrayed, to be willing to put her first, to be willing to initiate reconciliation, to be willing to provide for her needs, to be willing to protect her. How would the Holy Spirit have you play the part of sacrificial leader for your wives this week?

Prayer

Father I thank you for the glorious picture you've given us of Christ and His bride. We "fear and tremble" before it because we know we fall short. God help us…wash us of our impurities…cleanse us of our failures, consecrate us to the calling to love our wives sacrificially as Christ loved the church. And God help wives to follow the lead…because they are first and foremost following the lead of their ultimate groom…Jesus Christ.

While we continue to pray…have you surrendered to the bridegroom. He died for you…He proved His love for you. His love is not based on your loveliness…we all come to Him broken and in need of mercy and grace…and that is what He has for you this morning…mercy and grace. But you must receive it by faith.

Amen