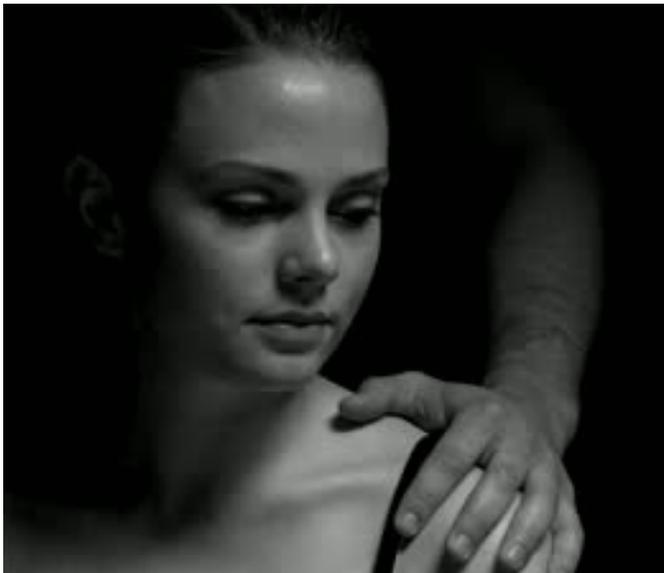




Wife loving

A sober reconsideration of Ephesians 5:25.



Greetings to all of you, in Christ. I would rather not write this article, but duty calls. I would much rather be continuing on with Part 8 of the “Greater Than Adam” series within the Romans series, which I hope to do next weekend. For now, the need arises to address something of immediate and thus vital importance to the saints.

One of my esteemed and beloved colleagues has recently published a series of electronic teachings on the topic of husbands loving their wives. Of course, many of you know of Clyde Pilkington’s “Daily Email Goodies.” These are faith-building tidbits of truth published daily. I read them daily, as they are a source of great encouragement and comfort to me. However, I feel that the recent offerings on the topic of husbandly love open a door of potential misunderstanding that, if left ajar, may cause more harm than good. Whether or not

my colleague intends to be saying what he appears to be saying is not something I wish to judge. I will only judge the *apparent* tenor and intention of the teaching on the page, and what the average reader (for that’s what I am) will likely take away from it, to his or her potential detriment. If I am somehow misinterpreting or misrepresenting everything my colleague is saying, then I apologize to everyone, especially to him. At the same time I will thank him (and he will probably smile and say, “You’re welcome!”—I know the guy) for launching us upon a valuable consideration and re-consideration of an important passage of Scripture.

THE TEXT UNDER CONSIDERATION

The Scriptural text under consideration is Ephesians 5:25-33. Let’s quote the passage in its entirety:

25 Husbands, be loving your wives according as Christ also loves the ecclesia, and gives Himself up for its sake, **26** that He should be hallowing it, cleansing it in the bath of the water (with His declaration), **27** that He should be presenting to Himself a glorious ecclesia, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it may be holy and flawless. **28** Thus, the husbands also ought to be loving their own wives as their own bodies. He who is loving his own wife is loving himself. **29** For no one at any time hates his own flesh, but is nurturing and cherishing it, according as Christ also the ecclesia, **30** for we are members of His body. **31** For this “a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh.” **32** This secret is great: yet I am saying this as to Christ and as to the ecclesia. **33** Moreover, you also individually, each be loving his own wife thus, as himself, yet that the wife may be fearing the husband.

Note the phrase “and gives Himself up” in verse 25. This is what Christ did for the ecclesia. According to Paul,

husbands are to be loving their wives “accord as Christ also loves the ecclesia and give Himself up for its sake.”

The most disturbing installment in this ongoing series is, to me, the one titled “The Scriptural Usage of ‘Give.’” Here are some of the definitions of the word, given by the author, from various dictionaries and lexicons. It is not the definitions that disturb me, but rather the loosely-worded statements made by the author based on the definitions. Here is a sampling of the definitions forwarded for the word “give”:

▶ to surrender, that is, yield up (James Strong, Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, G3860)

▶ to give or hand over to another (E.W. Bullinger, A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament)

▶ to give over into (one’s) power or use (Joseph Thayer, Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament)

▶ to deliver over or up to the power of someone (Spiros Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Dictionary)

▶ give up, give over, give way (A.E. Knoch, Greek-English Keyword Concordance)

The author then gives four examples from Scripture of this word in use:

Matthew 4:12 – “cast into prison” (“given up”)

Matthew 5:25 – “deliver to the judge” (“giving you up”)

Matthew 10:4 – “betrayed him” (“gives Him up”)

Acts 15:26 – “hazarded their lives” (“give up their souls”)

My colleague follows up with the comment:

These words speak of sacrifice and loss of liberty. Husbands are no longer their own; like Christ, by choice, they have sacrificially “given themselves up” as an approach present to their wives.

In an earlier installment of the same series (“The Husband’s Role in Love”), my colleague writes, concerning his conception of love based on his conception of Ephesians chapter 5:

“Husbands, love your wives” (Ephesians 5:25). Unreserved Love. His love for us was without limit, without condition, and without reservation. He not merely “gave,” He “gave Himself” (:25).

LOVING ONESELF

I am disturbed by the phrases “loss of liberty,” “husbands are no longer their own,” and “without limit, without condition, and without reservation.” When applying these loose interpretations to husbands loving wives as themselves with the implication, “Do this!” the author seems to assume three things: 1) it can be done, 2) it should be done, and 3) that husbands and wives love themselves first. As “1” and “2” are wrong and “3” is rarely the case, the author unwittingly yet essentially hands over a box of matches to children without so much as a warning label. The realm of consideration here, again, is marital love. Within that realm, the potential to misconstrue and misuse such loose, unscriptural phrases as “without limit” and “without condition” is so great that I feel forced to intervene before homes burn down. Sorry if I’m being presumptuous.

One of the most important sentences of the passage in question is a sentence too often overlooked, namely verse 33: “You also individually, each be loving his own wife thus, as himself.”

Paul founds his words upon the words of Christ in Mark 12:28-34—

28 And, approaching, one of the scribes, hearing them discussing, having perceived that He answered them ideally, inquires of Him, “What is the foremost precept of all?” **29** Jesus answered him that “The foremost precept of all is: Hear, Israel! the Lord our God is one Lord. **30** And, You shall be loving the Lord God out of your whole heart, and out of your whole soul, and out of your whole comprehension, and out of your whole strength. This is the foremost precept. **31** And the second is like it: ‘You shall be loving your associate as yourself.’ Now greater than these is no other precept.” **32** And the scribe said to Him, “In truth, Teacher, Thou sayest ideally that He is One, and there is no other more than He. **33** And to be loving Him out of your whole heart, and out of the whole understanding, and out of the whole soul, and out of the whole strength, and to be loving the associate as yourself, is excessively more than all the ascent approaches and the sacrifices.” **34** And Jesus, perceiving him, that he answered apprehendingly, said to him, “Not far are you from the kingdom of God.” And no one dared to inquire of Him any longer.

This precept is so important to Paul that he quotes it again in Romans 13:9. As another writer has ably put it:

The statement “love your neighbor as yourself” is not a command to love yourself. It is natural and normal to love yourself—it is our default position. Scripture never commands us to love ourselves; it assumes we already do.

What Scripture indeed assumes is far from today’s prevailing disposition. In today’s culture it is difficult to find those who love and respect themselves enough—especially in religious circles—to keep them from reading the recommendations of my colleague and decimating themselves in the name of “Ephesians Chapter 5!” For instance, men without any clear conception of a God-given identity will see a phrase like “without limit” (imported and imposed onto into Ephesians chapter 5; it is not inherently there)



and conclude that “giving up himself” for his wife means doing anything and everything she asks of him. *There are to be no limits*, he tells himself. Reading the definitions of the word “give” offered by my colleague will stoke this immature man’s religious fires as he says to himself: *I am to surrender all, yield all, cast myself into prison, hand myself over completely to the power of my wife!* All of this in the name of the strange brand of “self sacrifice” easily read into the recent string of “Daily Email Goodies.”

On the wife side of things, I can already see it happening and, in fact, have gotten wind that it has already happened. There are many men who do not love themselves, but in my opinion this condition overwhelmingly afflicts women. In childhood, many women failed to receive the necessary love of their fathers. More girls than you care to realize or want to think about have

been sexually abused by relatives or close family friends. Many young girls were raised in religious environments that imposed upon them an unhealthy terror of God. The result of these common misfortunes sends such women in search of not only a husband, but a father and a god. Lacking the well of personal validation and love from within, these women seek these essentials from without. They marry then, not out of a healthy desire to love and accept another human being as he is, but out of a diseased need to conform that other human being—the husband—into the father and the god that she never had.

Such women will latch onto Clyde Pilkington’s “Goodies” and use the subtle yet insistent drift there suggested to husbands (*give without limits, give yourself up, lose your liberty, give yourself over to your wife, you are no longer your own*) to challenge their husbands in an attempt to not only fill up their own bone-dry “love tank,” but to craftily test what they feel should be their husbands’ “unswerving devotion” to them. Few husbands are self-secure enough or love themselves enough to resist such bait. *According to Clyde Pilkington*—these husbands think—*I am not a good husband to my wife unless I surrender all, yield all, give all, and offer myself without limits to my wife. These are the words he used.* (If Clyde is not saying this, then the material needs serious clarification; I know people who are already misusing it.) Any man who takes this bait may very well “save” his marriage in the short run, but in the long run will subject himself to a living hell. *I’m suffering for Christ*, he will think. No. He will be suffering because of his own spinelessness, his lack of self-love, and his fatal and unfortunate misapprehension of Ephesians chapter 5.

A man who loves himself in accord with Mark 12:31 and Romans 13:9 will protect the borders of his person and will thus keep his personality in sight. In other words, a man will love, nourish and protect the person God made him. Only thus will he be able to love, nourish and protect a wife. (This is the import of “love your associate as yourself.”) He will certainly not give himself away “without limits,” for even though such a “sacrifice” may

appear to the religious eye to be a noble, selfless act, it is, ironically, a vainglorious display of selfishness. Although disguised as righteous giving, much that is done in the “sacrificing” department by love-starved souls is in reality desperate attempts at self-validation: “See how much *I* am sacrificing!”

“Scripture never commands us to love ourselves; it assumes we already do.”

According to our Lord and to Paul, one must “love [one’s] associate *as* oneself.” Thus, a proper and natural love of self must precede any attempt to love another in the manner demonstrated by Christ and recommended by Paul. This ought to be self-evident in any reading of Scripture (including Ephesians chapter 5), but in this day of so many damaged people, it isn’t.

A woman who loves herself will find her love and acceptance sourced in God. She will seek a husband, not to validate herself as a person (God has already done that for her), but to satisfy her God-given need to love and care for another. Because she already loves herself, she will love her husband freely without qualifications. She will not put “love tests” in his way for him to trip over. Her trust overwhelms any need of proof. She will thus resist shaming him into extreme feats of devotion that, while important to her (why wouldn’t they be? She invented them) are completely un-required by God, even in Ephesians chapter five.

“FOR ITS SAKE”

Another neglected portion of Ephesians 5 is the phrase “for its sake,” as in, “Christ gives Himself up for its sake”—speaking of the ecclesia—and a husband “giving himself up for the sake” of his wife.

In going to the cross, Jesus Christ did not undergo crucifixion to show off His selflessness. He had a goal in mind: to bring the ecclesia to a place of sonship. Thus we read in verses 26 and 27 of Ephesians 5:

... that He should be hallowing it, cleansing it in the bath of the water (with His declaration), that He should be presenting to Himself a glorious ecclesia, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it may be holy and flawless.

How does Christ accomplish this for the ecclesia? We need look no further than Jesus Christ’s first words concerning the first member of the body of Christ. In Acts 9:16, our Lord says to Ananias concerning the recently-converted Saul of Tarsus: “I shall be intimating to him how much he must be suffering for My name’s sake.”

Did not our Lord love Paul? Yes. But true love brings its object to higher ground.

Can you imagine this “love saying” worked into marriage vows?

MINISTER (to woman): Do you take this man to be your lawfully-wedded husband?

WOMAN: I do.

MINISTER (to man): Do you take this woman to be your lawfully-wedded wife?”

MAN: I shall be intimating to her how much she must be suffering for my name’s sake.

You may laugh, but it is not a joke. If the husband loves the wife in accord with Christ, he will set a spiritual goal for the two of them and see it to completion. There will be suffering, yes, but many joys along the way. The suffering they will *both* undergo will be that which nurtures growth. It’s the love that Christ has for the ecclesia. It’s the love that seeks the ultimate welfare of its object. Does any long-term welfare ever come without short-term pain?

In imitation of Christ, it is the husband who holds the vision for himself and his wife. It is he who will bring her to a higher place where she, with him, will become hallowed and cleansed, bathed and glorious, holy and flawless. Is this the recipe for an easy life? In a way yes, in a way no. I have learned over the years that discipline is easy, and laziness is hard. A husband with a vision for spiritual advancement for his family will avoid the snare of laziness. It will surely keep him from the American and perhaps worldwide affliction that I call the “Yes, dear” syndrome.

“You’re not making enough money.”

“Yes, dear.”

“I don’t like your friends.”

“Yes, dear.”

“You need a different job.”

“Yes, dear.”

“You don’t pay enough attention to me.”

“Yes, dear.”

“I’m tired of following your course for our life.”

“Yes, dear.”

“Life needs to be easier for me.”

“Yes, dear.”

I wonder what would have happened had Christ assumed this disposition when challenged by Peter?

CHRIST: I must be suffering much from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and then be killed, and then on the third day be roused.

PETER: God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to you!

CHRIST: Yes, dear.

I am acquainted with a man in Christ, fourteen years before this, (whether in a body I am not aware, or outside of the body, I am not aware—God is aware), who was married to a woman who seemed to never be able to get enough of his attention. The man tried to be everything to her and for her, but this only lasted an afternoon because it turned out to be too exhausting. Besides, he could only be who he was. This was a wonderful revelation and a troubling one at the same time because of all the trouble it would cause him. He never knew there were so many ways to disappoint a wife. No one had ever told him. He had naively thought that marriage was a gift rather than a struggle to fulfill another person's void. (He later realized that, even though he was only 22 years old at the

“His logic always infuriated her, to be sure. But always, with love and patience, he led the way.”

time and did many things wrong, his instincts about marriage were absolutely correct.) One day after many years of marriage, the wife said to him, “If a man really loves his wife, he will go into debt for her.” He really did love his wife. He took to heart whatever she said. He didn't always do what she said, but he took it to heart. The couple's house was old, but the man had paid it off in fifteen years so that the couple was debt-free. And yet, because of prevailing currents (everyone else's house was new; everyone else was in debt) and the wearing nature of time, the man felt guilty for feeling so happy that he had no debt. How selfish of him to be so happy when his wife's 1965 kitchen decor made her so sad. Truly, he needed to obey Ephesians chapter 5 and be “cast into prison” and “handed over” into his wife's “power,” for these were some of the definitions of “gives Himself up” in Ephesians 5:25—according to Thayer, Strong, Bullinger and others. So the man went into debt. After all, he must “give himself up without limits or reservations,” for the sake of his wife. Or so he thought. So this he did, to the tune of \$60,000. He did it because he “loved her.” He really did it because this is what his wife said she needed to feel loved.

About this time, the wife also thought it would be a good thing to work outside the home. The man did not like the sound of this. She was his helper in his work. But the job would “really make her happy” and “bring in more money,” she said. It is true that the man also thought he saw some advantages of it. Most of these had to do with money.

This man had for many years made hard decisions for his family. This started on his honeymoon when he suggested that, rather than indulge in the typical honeymoon, he and his wife should bicycle 350 miles down the east coast of Florida. For the most part, the couple had fun. It was a lasting memory. Two years later, the couple bicycled across the United States. On this three-month trip, the husband and wife learned more about each other than most couples learn after years of union. This journey brought them closer together, made them rely on God minute-by-minute, and blessed them with a lifetime of memories. The trip was the husband's idea, naturally. His wife resisted it at first. She hated everything about the idea. She yelled about it. She cried over it. The husband was persuasive, however. Years later, the wife would speak glowingly and with reverence of the trip, of how she had done something that she had never imagined she could do, of how it gave her a confidence in herself that she never knew she had, and of how it birthed in her a lifelong love of physical fitness.



Two years after this, the man decided that, following a difficult labor with their first son, his wife would be better suited delivering her next baby at home. This decision was immediately greeted with fear and resistance, but afterward yielded the peaceable fruit of glory, wonder, and a new son.

As the children grew up, the man decided that homeschooling the children would be the best course for his family. This was not the easiest course for the family. In fact, it was the hardest course. It would be especially hard on his wife. This decision being made, it was followed through upon. Where there was resistance, the man, as always, talked his wife through to a satisfying

consummation. He loved her through it. He challenged and cajoled, yes. His logic always infuriated her, to be sure. But always, with love and patience, he led the way, and she followed and was ultimately blessed.

In 1993 came the biggest and hardest decision of all. With three children now (the youngest being not yet a year old), the man searched his spirit (at the same time searching the Scriptures), and decided that God was calling him to quit his job with the United States Postal Service and write for Him full-time. He would be a fellow-laborer with God to bring people he did not yet know into the truth that God had prepared for them from before the disruption of the world. If the bicycle trip proposal brought rivers of tears to his wife, this proposal brought torrents. It would be a tough thing for any woman, no doubt. It was an even harder thing for the man because he was responsible for everything. If everything went to smash, it would



“Her wearing down wore him down. Bad things began happening.”

be his fault. When the wife asked how they would make a living, the husband said, “I trust God.” The wife eventually said, “I do not trust you, but I trust God.” It was good enough for the husband.

Month after month, year after year, God provided. He never stopped providing. The family did not grow rich by any means. In fact, they had less money than ever before. Yet they had enough. They fed their children oatmeal laddled from a great vat. They dried cloth diapers on a laundry line. They had little, but they were always together, and they were very happy. Everything the family did, they did in the home. The husband would later say that rais-

ing his children, doing his work, and loving his wife in that home was one of the most wonderful times of his life.

The family grew in the grace and the wisdom of God.

But the man’s wife became restless. The lack of money began wearing on her. Her siblings began building bigger and better houses. This was big trouble. Her parents moved from a humble home downtown to a new home they built in the suburbs. (More trouble.) Thus, the wife became restless. This had been building for many years. The pressure of seeing and feeling this restlessness would occasionally drive the man to think about pulling his car in front of a speeding train; many trains criss-crossed the county where the couple lived. Where before his wife had submitted to his vision in life in accord with the fifth chapter of Ephesians, now she was more persuasive about her own way. Her wearing down wore him down. It was his fault to let this happen. The flesh is weak, though.

The wife no longer wanted her husband working at home. “You are taking over the place,” she said to him one day. She insisted that he find an office downtown. The man felt hurt that his wife wanted him away from the home. Rather than standing firm as he always had and insisting upon staying, he wavered. For the first time in his marriage, he wavered:

“Yes, dear.”

Then came the request for debt and a nicer decor:

“Yes, dear.”

Then the request to work outside the home:

“Yes, dear. Whatever makes you happy.”

At this juncture of his life, the man was tired. He felt worn down and beaten. All he wanted now was for his wife to be happy. It was either this, or a speeding train. He began thinking that it was better to live in a wilderness area, or in the corner of a roof—or even to be hit by a train—then to live with a woman who was now more insistently contending with him and had lost sight of her role. He stayed, though. He had dedicated his life to her. If he did everything she wanted, then maybe she would finally be happy. (At this juncture of the union, the man had lost sight of *his* role.)

The worst began happening when the wife grew jealous of and began to resent the work of her husband. In her husband’s work, many people loved him. In her husband’s work, he sometimes went away for the weekend to speak at conferences. In her husband’s work, the money did come, but not reliably. And so the quiet, subtle suggestions crept in that he should give up his work and get “a real job.” The wife wanted to go to college. She wanted a degree. Two of her brothers had teaching degrees. She



wanted to “be someone” in the world. Her husband told her it was the “Scarecrow-of-the-Wizard-of-Oz” syndrome in that she required a formal document to prove to herself and to the world that she was smart. Her husband had told her over and over again that she was smart; she never believed him. He told her over and over again that she was beautiful; she never believed him. She never really believed him, with joy, about much of anything. But she had followed him, and life had been good—as good as any two people of differing genders could hope for.

Each time the job and the college topic would creep up, the man would “talk down” his wife from what felt to him like the edge of a cliff. He would do it lovingly, with great patience, and with the thing that really drove her crazy: logic. Because the couple had no money, the wife’s education would be free. If the husband got “a real job,” then school would cost money. It’s not that he didn’t want her to go to school. At first he didn’t want it, but then he saw how much it meant to her, and so he began encouraging her. He bought her books, sent her inspiring songs, and gave her cards telling her that it was her “time to shine.” For the wife, it was not about the logic of the thing. Rather, it was about the husband “sacrificing” for her, “giving himself up,” and doing so “without limit.” It was about his willingness to “lose his liberty” for her. If he *really* loved her, he would “no longer be his own,” but

would, at last, “give himself up into her power.”

He should “stop being selfish for a change” and “think about her for once.”

The wife had been talking to many other women at her job. These became her new counselors. Indeed, this was the beginning of the end.

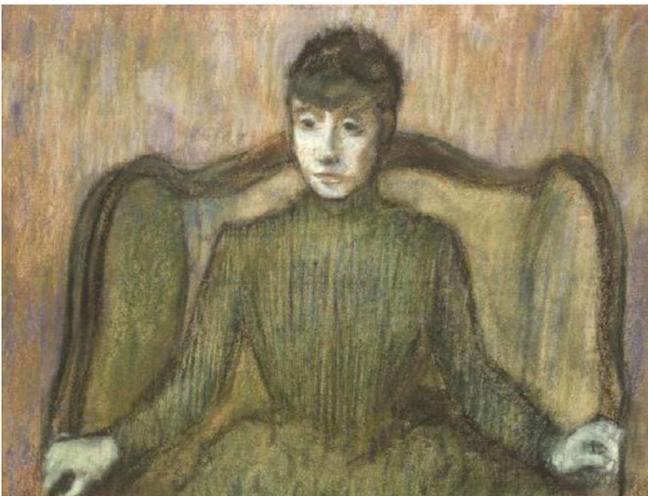
Then, five years later and twenty-five years into the union, I am acquainted with a man in Christ (whether in a body I am not aware, or outside of the body, I am not aware, God is aware), who once again fielded the insistence from his wife that he forsake his work and get “a real job.” This way, he could concentrate on “loving [her] for a change.” She had supported him for years, and now it was his turn to support her. These were her words: “It is your turn to support me.” The people at the school where she worked were now talking about how strange her husband was, that he did not have “a real job.” Her new girlfriends were also encouraging her need to “be somebody.”

The timing was ironic. The day before this, the husband had been alone on his knees in his bedroom questioning God about his future, and the future of his strange work. Was it time to quit? Time to change direction? The word from God came clearly then—through circumstance and Scripture—that he was to go on, and that there were many more who needed to hear, and

that he could certainly love his wife according to the fifth of Ephesians and do his work at the same time (his children were grown), and that his wife's requests were coming, not from a place of submission and love, but from a darker place that appeared to the world—and to her—as light. She now resented submitting to the man to whom she had begrudgingly yet with peaceable fruit submitted herself for so many years. It was the man's fault, too. He had let his role slip away.

But now this. The man turned that day to look at his wife. He would face her this day. The years of lovingly leading her came to him; the happy innocence of the trans-America bicycle trip, the joy of their son coming into the world in their bedroom, the reading to their children of classic literature in their little homemade school room. All of this came to him. But then, too, came the weariness of the last five years, the desperate want that his wife should just “be happy,” all the “yes, dears” he had uttered in his extremity that, rather than helping his wife, had by some strange alchemy exacerbated her misery. He hated now that somewhere along the line he had stopped leading his wife. Somewhere along the line, he had taken a subtle turn down the beaten path. He had gently and nearly imperceptibly skirted Calvary for the plush, greener valleys of Hinnom. In so doing, he had not only betrayed his wife, but himself. In thinking he was loving her in a “new and better way” and with such “great sacrifice,” he ended up resenting her—the very thing that he did not want to do. He had left the hard path of true love for the easy path of non-resistance that leads, always, to short-term “happiness” and long-term misery

And so he looked upon her this day, with all these memories on top of him, and with the same steady gaze our Lord tendered upon his beloved disciple, he said to her, “Get behind me, Satan.”



PETER: You didn't say that to her.

ZENDER: The words came before I could think.

PETER: No man says that to his wife.

ZENDER: It was too late to take it back.

PETER: You misread me. I mean that no man says it in *your* time.

ZENDER: Men have become as women today. You would not like it.

PETER: I could not live under it. Is it hard to lead?

ZENDER: Leading is considered abuse. Today it is about romance.

PETER: What is that?

ZENDER: A continual holiday for the soul.

PETER: What is marriage in the terms of your time?

ZENDER: It is a daily struggle to make a wife happy.

PETER: Wives are meant to be a help.

ZENDER: No more. They are “meant to be happy.”

PETER: Paul says a man is parted in order to please his wife.

ZENDER: That's one thing. But now put that on steroids.

PETER: I don't understand. Is caring for a wife like a second career?

ZENDER: If only. Try a first career. Try the major struggle of one's life.

PETER: It's not supposed to be that hard.

ZENDER: Can you tell me how He looked?

PETER: When He said that to me?

ZENDER: You had to have been shocked.

PETER: I did not expect it. It was gentle, but seasoned with salt.

ZENDER: So there was fire.

PETER: Oh, yes. And you?

ZENDER: The same thing. Maybe not as much salt and fire.

PETER: You saw through to the spiritual warfare.

ZENDER: The spirit in me saw through to that.

PETER: You said what Christ said.

ZENDER: I'm glad to hear you say that. It was love, wasn't it?

PETER: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.”

ZENDER: No one today sees it as love. I was just a thoughtless, selfish husband.

PETER: And yet our Lord said the very thing to me.

ZENDER: And He loved you.

PETER: All of us. I wept in His lap afterward. It is not recorded.

ZENDER: He was not easy.

PETER: Oh, never. But such love. Love that raises one.

ZENDER: So that very soon you will be ruling the Earth.

PETER: Imagine that. I will choose that over “yes, dear” any day, friend.

* * *

Perhaps a wife who revered her husband (Ephesians 5:33), would have bowed down in the face of such a calm yet weighty pronouncement and broken into tears of repentance. It should have been the change of a lifetime. The husband of such a wife, loving her more deeply than ever, would take her into his arms, kiss away her tears, and profess to her his undying devotion.

For the woman no longer trusting or revering her husband, such a hard saying would become one more reason to leave him for temporarily greener pastures, to find the “love”—from somewhere, anywhere—that she “truly deserved.”

* * *

The account of this man is common to humanity. In thousands, if not millions of “spirit-filled” households, such power struggles play out daily. In millions of homes, a wife cries and a husband folds. In accord with the world’s false conception of love—and in deadly union with a soulish misreading of Ephesians chapter five—wives are daring their husbands to love them “like good Christian men should.” The husbands, bowing to the extreme pressure not only of the times but of what appears to be Biblical insistence, surrender their vision for their wives and families. The gain? Short-term peace and quiet. The loss? Everything.

101.6 FM

The wife of a friend of mine insists on listening to Christian radio in the home. My friend is a spirit-filled believer, but his wife is a Christian and therefore not a believer. The husband hates when the Christian radio station is on because the teaching and the music is full of grievous error. It is soulish, not spiritual. It degrades God. It is hard for him to listen to, but even harder knowing that the religio-babble influences his young sons. He has to forget all this, however, because his wife likes listening to the station. My friend asks his wife if they can please turn off the Christian station, but she says that the broadcasts are “important to her,” and that it is her right to listen to what she wants in her home.

My friend, thinking he is being a supportive, loving husband, gives in to his wife. Isn’t this what Ephesians, chapter five is all about? His deepest impulse tells him to destroy the radio with his bare hands, but he must “give

himself up,” as Christ gave Himself up for the ecclesia. In this divine analogy, my friend’s wife represents the ecclesia, and my friend represents Christ. The ecclesia is weak, vacillating, unwise, stupid, but Christ is strong. Therefore (here comes the lapse of logic and the deadly misinterpretation), he must be like Christ and surrender what *he* wants so that his wife will feel loved.

“I counseled with a person who I thought was a wise source on these matters,” said my friend. “I asked him what I should do. He said, ‘It is a small thing to do for your wife.’ I asked what about my principles. He said that I could still hold to my principles, but that I did not need to exercise them. As the head of my home, I had the right to turn off the radio, but that Christ and Paul were asking me to surrender my rights, just as Christ surrendered His rights in Gethsemane.” I told



“I told him that Christ didn’t have to listen to Christian radio in Gethsemane.”

him that Christ did not have to listen to Christian radio in Gethsemane. My friend laughed, but the mirth was short-lived.

As could be predicted, my friend began resenting his wife. He hated that he was expected to surrender the exercise of his principles just to make his wife happy. The Christian radio station was not the end of it. Emboldened by her perceived autonomy, the wife began holding Pentecostal-style meetings in the home with her female



friends. My friend, convinced that it would have been unloving and un-Christlike for him to exercise his rights and forbid the meetings, would leave his house whenever the other women showed up. This only increased his resentment, to the point that he began hating his wife. He had never felt this before. He wrote once again to his trusted source and was told that, if he forbade the meetings, he could lose his wife. This thought terrified him. His children were teens, but still in the home. He would do anything to not lose his wife.

IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HARD

In an issue of the “Bible Student’s Notebook” (July 12, 2011; Vol. 13, #301), my colleague and friend Clyde Pilkington writes,

The relationship of marriage ... is in fact a commitment of the highest family level which takes a lot of work. Marriage is the hardest work of life ... marriages are an extremely hard work of commitment – extremely. There are no naturally good marriages. If the hard work of marriage is not done every day, marriages can just simply slip away.

Really? It is a good thing that ministers do not work this view of marriage into the vows:

MINISTER: You are now entering into the hardest work of your lives. Extremely hard. *Extremely*. Not *just* extremely hard work, but a *lot* of extremely hard work. Memorize this word, “extremely.” In fact, nothing you will ever do in life will ever be harder than this. Your default setting is failure—just so you know. That’s right, there are no naturally good marriages. If you do not work harder than you have ever worked in your life—and I am talking about every single day of this marriage—then your union is doomed to a guaranteed oblivion.

BRIDE AND GROOM (simultaneously): I believe our business is finished here!

Where is this viewpoint to be found in Scripture? Concerning marriage, God says at the beginning of His revelation to humanity in Genesis 2:18—

And Yahweh Elohim said: It is not good for the human to be alone by himself. I shall make for him a helper as his complement.

Wives are supposed to be their husbands’ helpers. Does this sound like extremely hard work to anyone? The

husband pursues his vision in life, and the wife helps him. On the way toward maturity, they hug and kiss.

Smack in the middle of a discussion on marriage and divorce, the apostle Paul writes, “God has called us in peace” (1 Corinthians 7:15). In the same context (verse 20), he writes: “Each one in the calling in which he was called, in this let him be remaining.” Since God has called each of us in peace, and since we are supposed to remain in this calling, marriage should never occasion the derailment of that peace.

IF THIS IS GOOD, THEN WHAT IS EVIL?

In another related “Daily Email Goodie,” my colleague quotes Solomon from Proverbs 18:22—

Whoever finds a wife finds good, and obtains the favor of the Lord.

The author of the “Goodie” comments:

Without any qualification, a wife is declared to be a “good” find, and is a direct result of Divine favor. Wisdom acknowledges this great truth.

God often has chosen to give some of His greatest servants the most challenging of wives (such as Job’s wife); still they are among the “all” that God is working for “good” (Romans 8:28). A man at odds with His Creator may become accusatory toward his wife and her role in his life, thus ultimately blaming even the nature of his circumstance on God Himself, “The woman whom You gave me ...” (Genesis 3:12).

We are all broken; we’re all groaning and subjected to vanity – ALL of us: men and women, husbands and wives alike. This is the nature of the beginning of God’s work that will end in glory for all of His creatures. For some husbands it will take the realization of faith to perceive and appreciate their wives genuinely as a favor from God.

Wives need to be reminded and encouraged of their divine placement as “good.” Husbands must foster in their wives an understanding and acceptance of her ordained “goodness.” Just like the husband, she’s God’s grand and valuable work. She doesn’t need struggle to be who God has already made her. It is God who has made her “good.” She only needs to be—be who she already is. This is her divine calling and placement. As husbands we are trustees and guardians of this “good.” Remind them of it often. Demonstrate it to them daily.

There is no doubt that everything God does is good. But by this absolute viewpoint, even World War II was good. Lung cancer is good; dead babies are good; women mating with horses is good. Is this the proper direction to take on this vital topic?

Relatively, not all wives are good. My colleague assumes that Solomon speaks “without qualification” that any wife would be a good wife. This is not so. If a man would marry Jezebel, it would not be good. Solomon’s assumption is the opposite of my colleague’s. The wise king assumes that anyone obtaining the favor of the Lord would be given a good wife, not an evil one. This agrees with how God dealt with Israel at the time: blessings and curses, good and evil. To support this view, I give you four other passages by this same writer (Solomon) in the same book of Scripture (Proverbs), in near context to 18:22—



“Whoever finds a wife
finds good.”

O-kaaaaay.

PV 12:4

An excellent wife is the crown of her husband,
But she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones.

PV 21:1

It is better to dwell in a wilderness land
Than with a quarrelsome and vexatious wife.

PV 25:24

It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop
Than share with a quarrelsome wife a house of partnership.

PV 27:15

A persistent dripping of water on a blustery day
And a quarrelsome wife—it is equal;
He who stifles her can stifle the wind
And can dictate to oil in his right hand.

Why weren't these passages quoted? Does anyone really think that Solomon is saying in 18:22, "He who finds a quarrelsome and vexatious wife who brings shame to him and is like rottenness in his bones, obtains favor from the Lord?" The thought is preposterous, especially as we consider Solomon's day. I say, "especially as we consider Solomon's day" because there is little doubt that in the current era, that is, in these days in which God is training sons and fellow-laborers to one day minister among the wicked sovereignties and authorities among the celestials, that God *will* insert difficult people into our lives (I agree with Clyde here), and that He *is* doing us an ultimate favor. Conversely, we also become the difficult people in the lives of others.

Having said this, King Solomon's above words still ring true: It *is* better to dwell in a wilderness land than with a quarrelsome and vexatious wife; it *is* better to live in a corner of the roof than share a house of partnership with a woman who consistently vexes, argues, and



contends. Paul's words are also still true, that we have been called in peace and that we are to continue in peace (1 Corinthians 7:15). Therefore, even God-ordained misery must be managed. How does one manage a contentious wife? Solomon throws up his hands and says, "He who stifles her can stifle the wind and can dictate to oil in his right hand." I am not so fatalistic and hopeless. I do have an answer, and so we return to the troubling Christian radio station at the home of my friend: 101.6 FM.

BLACKMAIL

I may get into trouble for comparing marriage to child-rearing, but there is a point of contact. Whenever my kids started driving me crazy, I had to stop and think, "Wait a minute. I am supposed to be driving *them* crazy." I realized at such times that the balance of power had shifted and that I had lost control. As soon as I regained the control due me, I was driving my kids crazy again and all was well.

**“I realized then that the
balance of power had shifted
and I had lost control.”**

When I say "I was driving my kids crazy again," I mean that I was exercising the authority given me and refusing to let them do foolish things like eat Oreos for breakfast. I would prohibit the Oreos, there would be the requisite whining, but then would follow "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" when my kids would settle down to enjoy a bowl of delicious oatmeal (with bananas) drawn from a vat.

I told my friend that he needed to "take back the streets" and tell his wife that, no, the Christian radio station was to have no place in their home. My friend then told me that he couldn't do it. His biggest fear, he said, was losing his wife.

Here is where millions of wives intimidate their husbands, and where millions of husbands lose the battle and ruin their lives. The wife thinks that she holds the ultimate card: "I will divorce you." Most husbands hearing this horrifying threat (and it is horrifying) immediately cower and cave. After all, divorce blemishes any godly man's resumé. Divorce, in Christian circles—or in any circles—is the ultimate failure. Not only that, it is unparalleled emotional heartbreak. Most good men would do anything to avoid it, including giving in to whatever their wives want. For the wife's part, this is nothing less than blackmail. It is

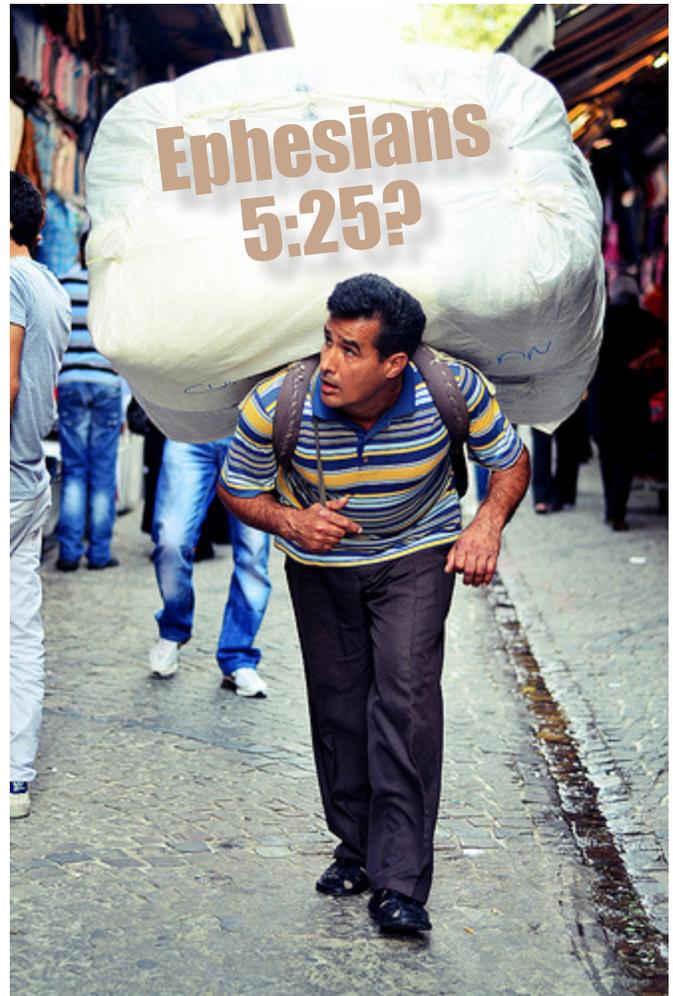
the vilest of evils. It is cruelty unmatched, sourced in the bowels of the Adversary. But never mind that. Men by the millions bow down to the false God. Men bow to Baal; the wife “wins”; the husband loses his peace and his God-given self-respect. His only comfort is that maybe he is living out Ephesians chapter five, and that, by “giving up himself” to his wife, he has performed an ideal act.

A sobering, unavoidable pitfall on this path is the husband’s ensuing resentment and bitterness toward his wife. In Colossians 3:19, Paul says, “Husbands, love your own wives and be not bitter toward them.” If a husband loves his wife in accord with the soulish dictates of a feminized society and a misreading of the fifth of Ephesians (that is, if he “surrenders himself completely” to his wife), it is *this* that will inevitably produce his bitterness. To me, Colossians 3:19 proves that the love of the context is not the soulish love of a feminized society, and neither is it a misreading of the fifth of Ephesians. Only the godly brand of love choosing the hard but right thing over the immediately pleasant path of least resistance will swing the balance of power back to the husband and curtail his bitterness.

What about the wife, then? Won’t she become bitter? I guess it would be up to her. She is supposed to submit to the husband: “As the ecclesia is subject to Christ, thus are the wives also to their husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:24). The wife is not to submit in some things, but in everything. This is Scripture speaking, not me. Wifely submission is a little-appreciated truth and wildly maligned. Few wives do it. It used to be popular “back in the day.” The societal tides shift, however, and the submissive wife became a politically-incorrect liability, socially undesirable, and even spiritually repulsive to some “enlightened” Christian camps.

A submissive wife is considered to be, by default, an abused wife.

With the shifting aforementioned tides, the emphasis has shifted to the husbands, “Husbands, love your wives.” It has never shifted back. Not only has it never shifted back, but burdens have been added to the back of this beast that it was never born to bear. As the Pharisees added reams of commands to the Mosaic catalog, so modern expositors heap foreign elements to “Husbands love your wives.” Rather than the wounding/kissing breed of love (*agape*) espoused by Christ (“faithful are the wounds of a friend”)—a love that would bring its object to cleansing, holiness and glory—the modern version now caters to whatever a wife perceives to be what she needs “to feel loved.” The tragic thing is that this debilitating husbandly surrender is committed behind the righteous garb of, “Husbands, love your wives.”



THE SOLUTION TO 101.6 FM

What should my friend have done? He should have outlawed the radio. “But then his wife would have left him,” you say. I doubt it. Nine times out of ten, this is a bluff. The wife is testing the husband. If the husband caves, the wife has “won.” What a dubious victory for her: more apostatized Christian radio; bitterness and resentment from the man not brave enough to defy her; eonian spiritual childhood. Such a “victory” would be akin to my kids successfully defeating my will and eating cookies all day. Three years later: “Congratulations, you have all contracted diabetes.”

What if it isn’t a bluff? Then the husband goes down doing the right thing, and the wife must answer to God for resisting wisdom. Not that the husband simply gives up. He reminds his wife of his love with conscious actions. Love is not a feeling, but an action. Even if he hates her, he forces himself to hug her. It may be like two boards hugging, but it is better than ignoring her.

If the wife refuses to be assuaged, then the husband lets her go. She has dug her own grave. This is a hard route, believe me. On the husband's part, it is a true act of love. Perhaps this is the very thing that will bring the wife to her senses. A day away from her husband, and perhaps reality will dawn. Or it may take a year. What if she comes back repentant? It could never have happened had the husband not taken a righteous stand. This is what godly conviction is all about. It is what godly men do. It is hard in the short run, but, like all discipline of the Lord, it is the thing most likely to yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Hebrews 12:11—

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

A husband must choose his battles. Certainly, he will not contend to the finish over the placement of the sofa or the color that his wife wants the bathroom painted. When it comes to running the home and all things practical, the wise husband gives his wife full sway. For battles, I am talking consequential matters not only of a spiritual nature, but of an emotional one.

No one gives alcohol to an alcoholic. Who would blame a husband for “not giving everything” to his wife when he refuses her drink to save her life? I know my friend Clyde would never do that, or ever recommend it. Emotional problems such as co-dependence and jealousy, however, are no less diseases than alcoholism. A jealous wife, for instance, will spy on her husband, attempt to control who he associates with, and censure him every time he notices a beautiful woman. (Men can be equally as jealous as women, but here we are talking about wives and the husbands loving them.) The husband who succumbs to any or all of these demands is no less guilty of ruining his wife than the man giving his alcoholic spouse liquor. Emotional issues like jealousy are black holes of need that, like the grave, can never be satisfied. Feeding them serves only to exacerbate them. (“Love is not jealousy”—1 Corinthians 13:4).

This speaks again to the “empty love tank” syndrome mentioned earlier in this writing. Jealousy is but one form of “love-void” produced in childhood by either an emotionally absent father or sexual abuse. Females seem particularly vulnerable to it. Co-dependence—where a person needs the affirmation of others to feel whole—is another common love-void. None of this is

“psychobabble.” No one hates psychobabble more than I. These very common emotional disorders result from unnatural conditions squelching the very basic and human Scriptural principle: “Love your associate as yourself.” Every emotional pitfall referenced here stems from a lack of what Scripture takes for granted: self love.

I do not claim these things to be the exclusively property of our day. They may be running amok today, but they are no strangers to bygone eras. Throughout time, people have hated themselves. Throughout time, true love has always devolved into a soulish catering to weakness that worsens people rather than raises them. In every age, people take the easy way out. Why do you think it took a “wounding lover” like Paul to draw such a hard line in Corinth with the man who had his father's wife? (1 Corinthians 5:1-8). I'll tell you why: Because every last member of that ecclesia was too weak to do it. The Corinthians actually boasted to Paul of their tolerance (1 Corinthians 5:6). They “loved the man” too much to hurt his feelings. Paul was the wrong guy to boast to about tolerance. “Clean out the old leaven,” insisted the apostle (1 Corinthians 5:7). Many examples can be given of Paul's “tough love.”

“Tough love” is not a modern invention of James Dobson; it is a timeless principle of God, our Father.



“Tough love is not a modern invention of James Dobson. It is a timeless principle of God, our Father.”

THE MODIFICATION OF “HARD WORK”

So watch now what happens when my friend hypothetically takes control of the radio. Let’s say this action so infuriates his wife that she threatens divorce. My friend swallows hard, remembers my statement that it’s probably a bluff, and strives to continue living with her in peace, and to “make a home with her according to knowledge, awarding honor to the feminine as to the weaker vessel” (1 Peter 3:7). This does not mean that he caves in to her radio demand. He doesn’t. This resolve shocks his wife. She can’t believe that her “wimp husband” actually took a stand. Most women deep down want this. They may claim to love gushy, easy men, but they deep-down hate them. A man’s constant acquiescence will eventually sicken a woman and make her despise him. Women are historically drawn to men of principle. These are men who live according to their convictions—damn what the world thinks. This “damn what the world thinks” is a Scriptural principle paraphrased by Paul when he writes in 1 Corinthians 4:3, “As for me, it matters very little how I might be evaluated by you or by any human authority.”

That’s a real man.

In this hypothetical situation, even though my friend’s wife is initially shocked, her husband’s conviction impresses her. She seeks to learn why he feels so strongly, and eventually comes to truth. This would never have happened had my friend simply let things go in the name of peace. What peace? Losing control of one’s own home is peace? Being forced out of one’s own house is peace? How loving is it to “let things go?” Ultimately, not loving at all. I have realized this by hard experience. I have tasted both things: conviction and tired acquiescence. Tired acquiescence never works in the long run. By being strong, my friend avoids the “marriage-is-the-hardest-work-you-will-ever-do” syndrome espoused by my colleague, at the same time affirming the “called in peace” truth forwarded by Paul. Sure it was hard to hold his ground, but in the long run this simplified my friend’s life. I have also learned over the years that discipline is easy and laziness is hard. It works this way every time.

The other hypothetical situation is that the wife actually does follow through and divorces my friend. This would be terrible. The bright side would be that, being now divorced, my friend would have happened upon another way to avoid the “marriage-is-the-hardest-work-you-will-ever-do” syndrome, a syndrome never meant to be endured: the vexing woman is gone. He didn’t leave his wife; she left him. Or she insisted that he leave. Divorce



“She can’t believe that her wimp husband actually took a stand.”

is never ideal, but it sometimes happens. This is why God allows for it. Paul allows for it in 1 Corinthians, chapter 7. The ex-wife may go around telling people, “My husband was mean to me; he did not love me,” but the husband will know the truth. He will let God judge him, rather than human tribunals.

Now let’s play out another scenario. Let’s say that the wife is bluffing. She’s bluffing, but she never softens to the truth. She stays in the marriage and never plays the radio again, but seethes inside and hates her husband daily. Even under these conditions, I still insist that my colleague’s “marriage-is-the-hardest-work-you-will-ever-do” syndrome is never viable. My friend continues to provide his wife’s basic needs (Exodus 21:10; Ephesians 5:25), but now resorts—out of necessity—to Solomon’s advice in Proverbs. In case you forgot:

PV 21:1

It is better to dwell in a wilderness land
Than with a quarrelsome and vexatious wife.

PV 25:24

It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop
Than share with a quarrelsome wife a house of partnership.

Every couple of weeks, my friend takes his tent into a wilderness land and camps. He goes away on a regular basis to clear his head (Proverbs 21:1). He finds new friends in the wilderness, such as foxes, squirrels, even brown bears. Now he's like Jesus who escaped to the mountains every morning for respite from his difficult disciples. My friend invites his buddies to come out with him. The men sit around a campfire at night and read Proverbs, marveling at the wisdom of the wisest man of his time and how ably he speaks to their twenty-first century trouble.



When my friend is home, he builds a little room in the corner of the attic (Proverbs 25:24), where he can do his own thing and dwell occasionally and happily apart from his quarrelsome wife while still providing for her physical needs. Is he running away from his problems? No. He is taking Scriptural advice. He doesn't separate himself from his wife completely. He shares meals with

her, still speaks softly to her, still shares intimacy with her if she allows it, and still lets her pick where the sofa goes. He is still "bearing [her] infirmities" (Romans 15:1). But he's not going to kill himself with what my colleague calls "a commitment of the highest family level which takes a lot of work." It's still a commitment yes, but my friend has ceased considering it a lot of work. It's no longer work, it's play. He's got his room in the attic and his buddies in the wilderness land, and by these godly escapes he can "hang in there" until either the snatching away or the time when he gets eaten by a brown bear. He has not shirked his duties, because he has not left his wife. He still promotes her ultimate edification (Romans 15:2). He is simply doing "the better thing" (see verses above), at the same time heeding Paul's injunction to be "remaining in peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15) and to remain married (1 Corinthians 7:11). He is for sure living out the fullness of Ephesians 5:25, as we shall see by the end of this writing.

The guy is Scripturally sound all the way around.

Now here is the worst-case scenario: Thinking that he is obeying Ephesians chapter five, my friend caves to his wife's demands. This leads to terrible resentment. Now he has to love a wife he can barely stand. At least in the ground-holding scenario he could feel sorry for her while feeling good about himself. This lovely little mental escape disappears in the face of the cave-in. Since his cave-in only encourages his wife to take more liberties, and since my friend is convinced that Ephesians chapter five is all about him surrendering liberties, he now has more and more things to resent his wife for, at the same time still being required (according to the Ephesians chapter five misapprehension) to love his wife with greater and more magnificent acts of sacrifice. My friend has become a miserable human "approach present" to an insatiably needy woman who becomes sicker, not better, in the face of his "sacrifice." This nightmare continues, perhaps, until, like the Savior Himself, my friend allows his wife to literally nail him to a cross. Sweet surrender! (She has wanted to do it for years, anyway.) I suppose this would be the ultimate "giving up" to anyone wishing to misapprehend Ephesians chapter five to the utmost degree of misapprehension available to mortals.

IT'S NOTHING NEW

My colleague, the author of "Daily Email Goodies," contends that the love that husbands owe wives, as set forth in Ephesians 5:25, is a new revelation:

Under the Mosaic Law the husband was not to abuse or neglect his wife, and was to assure that her physical needs (food, clothing and sex: Exodus 21:10) were adequately provided.

Under the Pauline revelation, love is added as the husband's preeminent responsibility – not just any love; the new standard is the love of Christ. Beyond that, it is Christ's love for the Ecclesia that is the model: sacrificial love. This new Christ-like standard goes far beyond anything that the law ever could have imagined.

Paul reveals a new pattern for marriage: Christ and the Ecclesia. This new revelation greatly increases the responsibility of husbands. As believing wives are already members of the Body of Christ, their role in marriage is unchanged from their “natural” role. However, the husband has been instilled with that which can be only divinely accomplished.

My colleague is correct in that the new standard is the love of Christ. Better to say: Christ is the latest and best *example* of love. However, love is certainly not “added” as the husband's preeminent responsibility. Rather, this “responsibility” is as old as Sinai. It has always been God's design for all of us—not just husbands—to love our associates as ourselves. Who would be a closer associate to a husband than his wife? According to the Lord Himself, this is the second most important precept, second only to, “You shall be loving the Lord God out of your whole heart, and out of your whole soul, and out of your whole comprehension, and out of your whole strength” (Mark 12:30).

Paul confirms the transadministrational importance of “love your associate as yourself” in Romans 13:9. He applies it to wives in Ephesians 5:28, 33.

Leviticus
19:18*

Same old.

Ephesians
5:33*

Same old.

Different audience.
New Example.
Same truth.
Wives.

jews

greeks

* Leviticus 19:18— “Love your associate as yourself.”

*Ephesians 5:33— “Love your wife as yourself.”

WIVES NATURALLY “DO IT”

From the “Daily Email Goodie” titled “The Husband's Role in Love,” my colleague and friend writes:

Love is uniquely the role of the husband. We'll seek in vain to find such command for wives. There is never a directive that says, “Wives, love your husbands.”

Why is there no such directive? Because wives already love their husbands. They don't need to be told to do it any more than they need to be told to love their children. This is not to imply that these wives *like* their husbands and children. There's the rub, and it explains Paul's exhortation to wives with respect to their responsibilities in the family.

Titus 2:4—

... that [the aged women] may bring the young wives to a sense of their duty to be fond of their husbands, fond of their children.

“Fond” is the *Concordant Literal New Testament* translation of the Greek word *phileo*. Whereas the Greek word *agape* speaks of a love refusing to consider the worthiness of its object, *phileo* does. It is brotherly affection. It is more of an emotional word than *agape*. It is the equivalent of our word “like.”

I always knew that God loved me, but what a shock when I realized that He liked me. To like or be fond of someone is harder than loving them. Whereas love is an action, fondness is an emotion. I can love my enemies without being fond of them. Thankfully, nowhere in Scripture am I told to be fond of my enemies. Paul exhorts wives, therefore, to do the harder thing. He exhorts husbands and wives to do what is respectively the more difficult for each.

Douglas Wilson writes in an article titled, “Husbandry”—

When the Bible gives a specific command to husbands as husbands, and does the same for wives as wives, the emphasis in the respective commands is distinctly different. Wives are nowhere specifically commanded to love their husbands. In one passage, the older women are urged to teach the younger women to be “husband-lovers.” But the word is a compound word (*philandros*), and the form of the word for love refers to a warm affection. Women are fully capable of

loving a man and sacrificing for him, while believing the entire time that he is a true and unvarnished jerk. Women are good at this kind of love, but the central requirement given to wives is that they respect their husbands.

Men, on the other hand, are commanded to love their wives (*agapao*) as they love their own bodies. Men are generally poor at this kind of loving.

Paul has no need to tell husbands and wives to do what they necessarily think of themselves. Men are stronger than women and can easily abuse them physically. It is easy for wives to love their husbands (children as well), even while considering them jerks. The exhortation to wives to be fond of their husbands should not imply that wifely love is either absent or, worse, discouraged. The precept “love your associate as yourself” applies to both husbands and wives. My colleague writes in a “Goodie” titled “The Husband’s Role in Love”—

... the husband is to be the lover. He is the divinely appointed initiator and sustainer of marital love. Going beyond the Law, the Pauline mandate is, “Husbands, love your wives.” Love is uniquely the role of the husband.

Paul’s mandate does not go beyond the law, for the law said the same thing Paul is saying: “Love your associate as yourself” (Leviticus 19:8). The example of love is new (Christ) but the mandate is not. Paul is introducing this concept to Greeks who have probably never heard of the concept from the law. Neither is love uniquely the role of the husband; husbands are simply weaker at it and require exhortation. Husbands *and* wives are to be lovers. To belabor the point that “wives are not told to love their husbands” in the interest of saddling husbands with some new, solo, monumentally difficult marital responsibility, is not only a miscarriage of sound exegesis, but of Scriptural context.

“Paul is introducing this concept to Greeks who have probably never heard of the concept from the law.”

EVEN CRIMINALS CAN DO IT

Paul reveals a new pattern for marriage: Christ and the Ecclesia. This new revelation greatly increases the responsibility of husbands. As believing wives are already members of the Body of Christ, their role in marriage is unchanged from their “natural” role. However, the husband has been instilled with that which can be only divinely accomplished.

—Clyde L. Pilkington Jr.,
“The Husband: A Christ-like Example”

Love is not an emotion, it is an action. True love edifies rather than pacifies. True love is not the soulish brand found in the world, but the spiritual variety found in God and Christ. True love often elicits anguished tears. The love of God and Christ tries us, refusing us many things we think we need “to feel loved.” We do not know what we need. Only God knows, and so He withholds from us temporary soulish joys so as to elevate us to a higher place as sons and daughters. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend,” wrote the wise man (Proverbs 27:2). “The Father is scourging every son to whom He is assenting” wrote Paul (Hebrews 12:6).

This is the kind of love with which husbands ought to love their wives, all the while hugging, kissing, and speaking softly to them.

Having spent the better part of 10,000 words proving this, I now tell you that the aforementioned mature brand of godly love is higher in spiritual value than what Paul aspires to for husbands in Ephesians 5:25 when writing, “Husbands, love your wives according as Christ loves the ecclesia.” The truth is that, not only is Paul *not* giving husbands a “new, increased responsibility” unknown even to the law, but he is giving them something so old and so basic to human nature that even criminals can do it. It may not occur to them at first, but they can surely do it.

THE MEANING OF “ACCORDING AS”

“Husbands, be loving your wives according as Christ also loves the ecclesia, and gives Himself up for its sake” (Ephesians 5:25).

If I were to ask you if this verse proves that Paul wants husbands literally crucified for their wives, you would say, “Well, of course not!” I would answer, “But why not? Doesn’t Paul say that the love of husbands is to be performed ‘according as’ the love of Christ? And was not Christ crucified?” At this point, you would probably ask,



“Well, what is the meaning of *according as*?” At this point, you would be on the right track.

The Greek word translated “according as” is *kathos*. Its definition is, “denoting harmonious correspondence and agreement.” Does “harmonious correspondence and agreement” between two things imply carbon-copy likeness? Let me ask this: Are musicians in harmony playing the same instrument? Or, could it be that “harmonious correspondence” speaks, not of identical likeness, but of a critical point of agreement between two things being compared. One other reference where *kathos* appears will show the importance and validity of this consideration.

In Galatians 2:7-8, Paul writes,

But, on the contrary, perceiving that I have been entrusted with the evangel of the Uncircumcision, according as Peter of the Circumcision, for He Who operates in Peter for the apostleship of the Circumcision operates in me also for the nations.

The “according as” in this passage is the same “according as” (*kathos*) in Ephesians 5:25. Two things are being compared: 1) Paul and the evangel of the Uncircumcision, and 2) Peter and the evangel of the Circumcision. Does the “according as” in this passage prove that the two evangelists are the same? No. Does it prove that Peter and Paul are doing the same things? No. In fact, in many instances, Peter and Paul are doing opposite things. But because of the presence of *kathos* (“according as”), there is a “harmonious correspondence and agreement” to be found somewhere here. We don’t need to guess; Paul states it in the context with the word “for.” The presence of the word “for” says: “What I am about to tell you explains what I just said.”

... for He Who operates in Peter for the apostleship of the Circumcision operates in me also for the nations.

It’s that simple. There is only one point of correspondence between Peter and Paul and their respective evangelists, and it is that the spirit of Christ operates within both men, and in both evangelists.

Although Ephesians 5:25 is not strictly a figure of speech, it holds up one thing (Christ’s love for the ecclesia) to picture another thing (a husband’s love for his wife). In so doing, it closely resembles a simile, where two *dissimilar* things (in this case, Christ on a cross and a man, let’s say, standing in a kitchen making salad with his wife) are said to be like one another. Along this line, A.E. Knoch writes in “Limitations of Figures” —

Figures, especially those of likeness, must be strictly limited to the point, or points, of contact, for it is axiomatic that there is unlikeness in all other particulars. They must never be used as if they were true in fact. Therefore it is unwise to use figures of speech as a basis of reasoning, for the points of contact are limited to those stated or apparent, and they may not be extended to other relations. Thus when Paul speaks of betrothing the Corinthians to Christ, he refers only to their singleness and purity. The figure does not include any other aspect of betrothal or refer in any way to marriage. It is confusing to connect it with such figures.

The point to press in figures of likeness is that they depend upon *unlikeness*. Two objects must be unlike in the main, and similar in one or more particulars, in order to be a figure. Under no circumstances must the likeness be allowed to go beyond these particulars, or the figure is violated. So also, in parables the salient points alone are to be pressed, for much detail may be included which merely makes the picture complete.

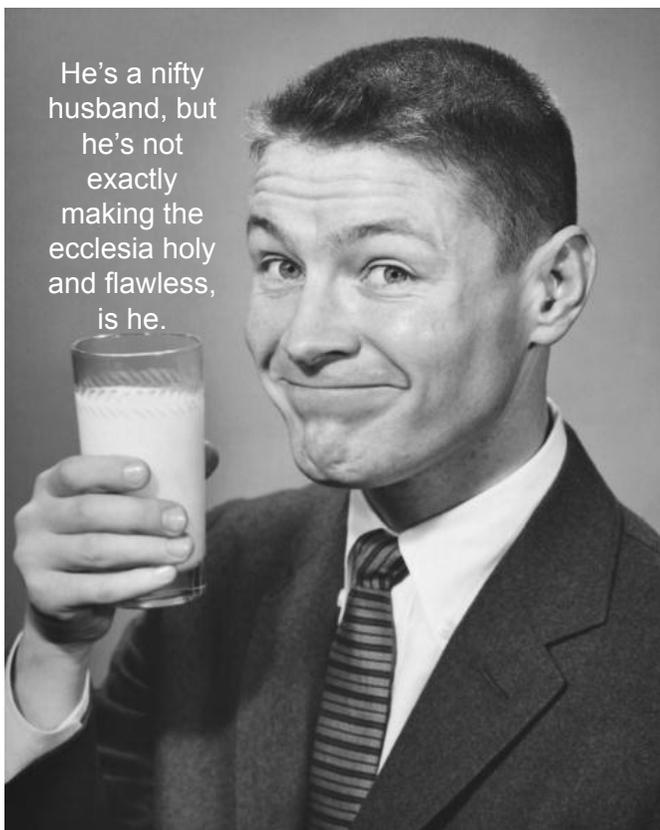
This is precisely what is happening in Ephesians 5:25-27. Jesus Christ on the cross and a husband in a kitchen making salad with his wife are dissimilar in more ways than they are similar. Jesus Christ is naked, the husband is clothed; Jesus Christ is being killed, the husband is pitting olives; Jesus Christ is nailed to a cross, the husband walks freely between the refrigerator and counter top; Jesus Christ is the son of God; the husband is an ordinary man; Jesus Christ is dying for the sins of the world, the husband is shredding lettuce; Jesus Christ is hallowing an ecclesia, the husband is hollowing an avocado—on and on we could go.

So what is the point of contact—that is, the similarity—demanded by the words “according as”? In what *aspect* is a husband’s sacrifice to correspond to Christ’s? Clearly it is not in nakedness, nails in the wrist, or dying for the

sins of the world. As in Galatians 2:7, we don't have to guess. In accord with what A.E. Knoch explained to us above concerning likenesses, Paul strictly limits his comparison to a single point of contact. The scope of Paul's comparison, therefore, cannot be extended to other relations ("all other particulars") in the comparison (dying, nakedness, giving oneself up to death, hallowing an ecclesia), without violating the comparison. Paul tells us exactly what the similarity is with one of the most overlooked words of this passage, found at the beginning of verse 28: "Thus."

"THUS"

Thus, the husbands also ought to be loving their own wives as their own bodies. He who is loving his own wife is loving himself. **29** For no one at any time hates his own flesh, but is nurturing and cherishing it, according as Christ also the ecclesia, **30** for we are members of His body.



Not until verse 28 does Paul give husbands specific instruction of how to love their wives. Up to this time, beginning in verse 25, he is merely setting up the likeness: "Husbands, be loving your wives according as Christ also loves the ecclesia ..." Beginning at the end

of verse 25 and continuing to the end of verse 27, Paul details, specifically, how Christ loved the ecclesia. These are the "other relations" and "all other particulars" that, according to A.E. Knoch, we cannot apply without violating the comparison—that is, once we learn the comparison. Paul, then, is *not* instructing husbands to do what follows in verses 25b-27; these are the things *Christ* did. Paul forwards these things, not because he intends them to be carbon-copied (this is not the meaning of "according as"), but because Christ has become the best example known in Scripture of the *kind* of "giving up" Paul hopes to elicit in husbands:

... and gives Himself up for its sake, **26** that He should be hallowing it, cleansing it in the bath of the water (with His declaration), **27** that He should be presenting to Himself a glorious ecclesia, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it may be holy and flawless.

After heralding Christ, Paul *now* gives specific instruction to husbands, beginning in verse 28 with the word "Thus," which carries the sense of, "And so ..."

IT IS LIMITED TO THE BODY, THAT IS, THE FLESH

The context immediately preceding 5:25 ought to give away the coming exhortation. Paul writes in verses 22-23—

Let the wives be subject to their own husbands, as to the Lord, for the husband is head of the wife even as Christ is Head of the ecclesia, and He is the Saviour of the body.

Christ is the Savior of the body. Here is a play on words. The body Paul refers to is the body of Christ, the ecclesia, the group of people to whom we belong. The word "body" also refers to this vessel of flesh we carry around. Here, then, is the inspired comparison between what Christ did and what a husband is to do: *Christ saved the body, thus husbands are to love their wives as they love their own bodies.* Would Christ abuse his own body, that is, the ecclesia? No. Rather, He gave himself up for it and died for it to hallow and cleanse it. This is the opposite of abusing it. So neither should a husband physically abuse his wife. Would he physically abuse his own body? Very well then.

A.E. Knoch writes on this passage in his *Concordant Commentary on the New Testament*:

Christ and the ecclesia are one body. Hence the husband is exhorted to love his wife as his own body, for it is thus that Christ loves the ecclesia.

How did we ever overlook this? It's so simple. Paul plainly states the point of correspondence between Christ saving the body and a husband loving his wife (28-30):

Thus, the husbands also ought to be loving their own wives as their own bodies. He who is loving his own wife is loving himself. For no one at any time hates his own flesh, but is nurturing and cherishing it, according as Christ also the ecclesia, for we are members of His body.

Again, how did we miss this? It's a simple exhortation to take care of a wife's flesh and not hurt it. Men are stronger than women and can easily hurt them. Paul doesn't want anyone in the ecclesia doing that. Paul: *Did Christ do this kind of thing to the ecclesia? No? So don't you do it. I want you to hug and feed and keep your wife dry, as opposed to hitting her. Can you do that? I insist that you do it!* Down through the ages, the abuse of women has been tragically common. Do you think it was absent in Paul's day? In the day of Moses? What made us complicate this passage? Was it the desire to accomplish rare spiritual heroics? To pride ourselves in outshining other husbands? The imagined necessity of pampering a wife to ensure her continuance under our roof?

As soon as I saw this truth, I wrote to a friend:

There is the simple answer, plainly stated. It is a matter of nurturing rather than abusing a wife's body, that is, her flesh. The word "flesh" appears twice in this passage: "For no one at any time hates his own *flesh*," and "the two shall become one *flesh*." Christ could have destroyed the ecclesia for its disobedience, but He did not. The disciples wanted Him to destroy the Jewish ecclesia: "Call down fire." But no. Rather, He saved all ecclesias, all flesh. He saved the body (5:23). This corresponds to the teaching in the law concerning what a husband owes his wife: "Food, clothing, shelter, sex" (Exodus 21:10). All of these things speak to nurturing the wife's flesh, her body. It is simple, basic care. I see no great spiritual heroics here. My conclusion is that Ephesians 5:25-33 speaks specifically to the common problem of the physical abuse of women, no more, no less.

Doug Wilson writes:

A husband should be as solicitous for the welfare of his wife as he is for himself. This is nothing less than the Golden Rule applied to marriage.

I would say that it is nothing *more* than the Golden Rule applied to marriage.

THE GREATER CONTEXT

A consideration of the greater context should have helped us see this simple, easy truth coming. To divorce a passage like Ephesians 5:28-31 from its surroundings and to say something like, *Here is a rare and extremely difficult new standard of loving, and a heavy new responsibility that only extremely dedicated and sacrificial husbands will be able to accomplish*, is to abuse the greater context.

This chapter is about behavior. In Ephesians 5:3-7, Paul writes—

Now, all prostitution and uncleanness or greed—let it not even be named among you, according as is becoming in saints—and vileness and stupid speaking or insinuating, which are not proper, but rather thanksgiving. For this you perceive, knowing that no paramour at all or unclean or greedy person, who is an idolater, has any enjoyment of the allotment in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one be seducing you with empty words, for because of these things the indignation of God is coming on the sons of stubbornness. Do not, then, become joint partakers with them.

Why do you think Paul is warning here about vileness, stupidity, cult prostitution, greed, and idolatry? I hazard a guess that he was writing people who were knee-deep in these very things.

In verse 18 Paul writes:

And be not drunk with wine, in which is profligacy, but be filled full with spirit.

Were there believers in Ephesus and in the other ecclesias who were drunkards? I will say, "yes."

My point is that Paul is not asking idolaters, paramours or drunkards—or even recent idolaters, paramours or drunkards—to scale monumentally new and difficult spiritual heights uncommon to common men. This passage of Scripture is written to common men, in fact, to worse-than-common men. The simple exhortation here is: "Cherish your wife's flesh; don't abuse it. Care for it as you care for your own." Certainly, common men feed themselves, drink water, exercise, bathe, sleep out of the rain, and don't punch themselves in the face. All right? So let them treat their wives the same way. Common men



“Even evil, sinful men cannot hate their own bodies.”

—A.E. Knoch
Concordant Commentary on the New Testament; Ephesians 5:29

This man is evil and sinful, yet he does not hate his own body. Not even he can bring himself to punch himself in the face. Therefore, he has all the spiritual werewithal he needs to love his wife in accord with Ephesians 5:25-33.

IN CLOSING

I love my brother Clyde Pilkington. I have lived with him and seen the man in action. He is a fine husband and father. He is the farthest thing from a hypocrite I have ever met. No one of my acquaintance has more of a servant’s heart than Clyde. When awards at the dais come up for service, I will gladly applaud from the bleachers as Clyde collects his wreaths. It’s going to take awhile.

Clyde would never consciously write commentary that could so easily be abused by weak, self-hating, or religiously zealous people. He is none of these things, and neither is anyone in his immediate circle. That Clyde has left the door of potential misinterpretation so far ajar in his latest series of “Goodies” speaks to an innocence for which God alone can be thanked. I thank God today for not sparing me. I have

can do this; it does not require uncommon dedication or tremendous spiritual sacrifice. It certainly is not “the hardest work of life.”

As A.E. Knoch writes in his commentary:

“Even evil, sinful men cannot hate their own bodies.”

This simplicity accords with Paul’s admonitions to children, fathers, slaves and masters in chapter 6:

CHILDREN: “Be obeying your parents” (1)

FATHERS: “Don’t vex your children” (4)

SLAVES: “Be obeying your masters” (5)

MASTERS: “Be lax in threatening” (9)

Not exactly the stuff of spiritual genius. And neither is Ephesians 5:25-33.

founded in the same waters where others now sink. I have broken out to see another daybreak. Perhaps it was all for this. If the present writing helps one person, I am grateful. If it offends many, such was not my intention. If it injures my brother, I weep and wonder why God would do this to us. If no one is helped, I am still the better for having worked as unto my Lord, and will see the fruit from my labor in the hour of reaping. —MZ

The divine parallel, and Paul’s point:

► **Christ saved the body (Ephesians 5:23).**

► **Cherish your wife’s body (Ephesians 5:29).**