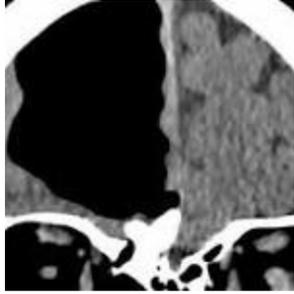




Do you know want to know the problem with marriages today? The problem with marriages is that it's not really a marriage problem per se. It's a men and women problem. They are just so different from one another. Waffles and spaghetti. Venus and Mars. Apparently, we are not even from the same planet. And then this thing called marriage asks these two different people to live together in idyllic harmony while they raise their 2.5 amazing children together.

I have this problem where sometimes I can't find things in the house. When I can't find something, my gut reaction is to ask Karen where she put it. Right guys—is this your go to method as well? Now once in a while, she did move said object and this is why it is lost to me, but by and large, it's all me. About two weeks ago we had a classic incident. I was looking for the beef bullion in the lazy susan. I easily found the chicken bullion—easily. It was right there—boom. I knew what the beef bullion container looked like. I knew the height, depth, width and color. I knew exactly what I was looking for, but I rotated that that lazy susan over and over and for the life of me, I could not find it. So I did what all of the strongest men who have ever lived do—I asked my wife. I had barely had the words out of my mouth—“Honey, can you help me find the...”—“Here it is!” I'm telling you, the woman is a sorceress! One second the bullion was not there and the next it was. It materialized out of thin air. Black magic, I'm telling you. We both got a good laugh out of it—well, Karen laughed more than I did, but you get what I mean.

Men and women are just so different and after all of these millennia, I have discovered the reason why. This news broke this past Wednesday. “Doctors find air pocket where part of man's brain should be.” You can't make this stuff up. Never again will you ever be able to tell a girl that she's an airhead because now there's scientific evidence that this is a boy thing!



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Men and women are so different, but that still doesn't answer the question as to why there are so many marriage problems. How many guys went to one of the Promise Keepers events when they were at their peak twenty years ago? Many of you have no idea what I am talking about. They filled stadium after stadium of men—60,000 at one time. Two years in a row I went to the old Metrodome in Minneapolis with my former church. Each time we filled up one or two coach buses filled with men from our church and the community who wanted to hang together and presumably, become better men and better husbands.

When we returned, instead of a sermon on Sunday morning, the men would share what they learned at the event and how they were impacted. Guys would stand up and share a highlight of the weekend or what impacted them the most. One husband stood up to share but instead of telling the congregation what he had learned, he called his wife up the front of the church. I don't recall the details of what he shared, but he addressed his wife in front of 150 witnesses and made a long string of promises to her. Honey, I promise this and I promise that. I won't do that horrible thing anymore and I'll start doing this wonderful thing you've wanted me to do. After he had finished his little speech, she stood there with her arms crossed and said two words: "We'll see."

Ouch. It was the proverbial 'you could have heard a pin drop' type of moment. There was only one reason for her quick retort. This man had obviously made a string of empty promises for years and had not kept them, so why should his wife trust him now. We'll see. There's still a part of me that hurts for that poor guy when I think about that story. He may have suffered a few moments of embarrassment in front of his church, but she had suffered years of broken promises.

Unfortunately, this is far too common of a scenario, even in Christian homes. Why can't men be better keepers of their promises? Remember the Matt Chandler quote from last week? Why are so many men morons? It's not just men, though that will be a focus for the next week or two. And again, the problem is not a marriage problem and it's not a men and woman problem. It's a sin problem. And I want you to see that as good news. We can't change the difference between men and women but there is something we can do about sin.

I have made two bold statements since starting this series on marriage. First, I said that this passage is the theological solution to all marital problems. Make sure you understand that correctly. It's the theological solution to all marital problems. In other words, rightly understood and rightly applied, the truths in this passage will solve your marital problems. But this passage is not a marriage Scripture per se. This passage is fundamentally a gospel passage. Paul

reminded us that *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.* Does that sound like a marriage sermon to you? It's a gospel sermon and the gospel has the power to forgive and heal sin.

If you don't believe me that marital problems are fundamentally sin problems, then you must have missed most for the messages through this amazing book of Ephesians. Here is just a quick summary of the sins that will peace in a marriage or in any relationship.

- ❑ Falsehood (lies, deceit, half-truth) 4:25
- ❑ Stealing 4:28
- ❑ Unwholesome talk 4:29
- ❑ Bitterness (anger turned inward) 4:31
- ❑ Rage (anger turned outward) 4:31
- ❑ Anger 4:31
- ❑ Brawling (quarreling/shouting) 4:31
- ❑ Slander 4:31
- ❑ Malice (intending harm by our words) 4:31
- ❑ Lack of kindness, compassion & forgiveness 4:32
- ❑ Sexual immorality/impurity 5:3
- ❑ Greed (coveting) 5:3
- ❑ Obscenity (obscene speech) 5:4
- ❑ Foolish talk/coarse joking 5:4
- ❑ Wives not submitting to their husbands 5:22
- ❑ Husbands not loving their wives 5:25
- ❑ Children disobeying their parents 6:1
- ❑ Parents exasperating their children (making them angry) 6:4
- ❑ Parents not training and instructing their children 6:4

So among other things that need to happen, husbands and wives need to fight against all manner of sin. This is the reason that this marriage series is not just a marriage series. If this is a sin issue and we're all sinners, then this marriage series is for all sinners.

The second bold thing I have said is that we desire to be known as 'the church whose husbands love their wives.' Even when we were delving deep into submission and headship, even when we were laying the focus on the wives, this has been our theme. That God would change us and so transform us that the community would know that we are the church whose husbands love their wives. Ladies, I hope you understand that this is as much about you as it is about your husbands. Just as husbands need to be so gentle in their headship that you will want to submit to their leadership, so to, you can do things which will give your husband the freedom to love you better than you have ever been loved before. If we want to be known as the church whose husbands love their wives, it won't happen with only half the people working on it.

And the pathway from here to there is not found in simple marriage slogans and advice. If the problem in marriages is sin, then the answer is the gospel—repentance and belief. I'm not saying

that's easy, but it is that simple. I can't make you do the right thing, but I can show you how to enter into or else continue in the lifelong process of sanctification. As I read this, decide for yourself if this sounds like a passage about marriage or a passage about the gospel?

²⁵ 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. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body.

This is clearly a gospel passage. As we understand what Jesus did for us in the gospel, then and only then can we make applications to the husband's particular kind of love for his wife. So what we need to do as we work our through this section is to first figure out exactly how Christ loved the church and then see how this applies to the husband's love.

1. Jesus gave up his rights.

We all know that Jesus gave up his life, and we'll get to that. But we forget that before he gave up his life, he first gave up his rights. Philippians 2 tells us that to "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself..." This is describing the incarnation, when God became a man. In the incarnation, Jesus was still fully God, but he also had the limitations of being a man.

Jesus laid aside his rights. Think about what this meant for him. He did not even have to create mankind let alone redeem mankind. From a divine perspective, all of that was optional. For all eternity he had been in perfect, unbroken fellowship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that he and the Father were one. Husbands and wives become one flesh. We learn about one flesh and we experience at some level what one flesh is like, but we really do not have a clue. We have no idea what eternal perfect oneness would have been like. We have absolutely no clue how difficult it would have been for Jesus to have laid aside his rights like this.

Here's why I like how this applies to marriage. Jesus gave up his life for the church. That's the ultimate sacrifice, and we'll get to that in a moment. So as husbands, we should be willing to give up our lives for our wives. Again, this is not a new concept to us. We would take a bullet for our wives, would we not husbands? Of course you would. Theoretically, you would take a bullet for her. Hypothetically, you would stand between her and the bad man who just broke into your house. In an abstract, potential, speculative, ideal and wishful kind of way, 100 times out of 100, you would lay down your life for your wife. But will you lay down your rights for her? Will you get out of bed and go get her a glass of water? Will be considerate of her in a gentle manner? Will you just sit and listen to her concerns and worries? Will you give up your rights for her and serve her? It doesn't mean that you roll over and play dead, but it does mean that your chief concern will be for her and not for your selfish interests. That is loving your wife as Christ loved the church. But you know what, we're just getting started on this path.

2. Jesus gave up his life.

We all know that Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice. The single greatest act of injustice the world will ever know happened when the sinless God-man suffered the agony of crucifixion and bore the wrath of the Father for us. This is the gospel and this pure love is the model for husbands. But we've already established that most husbands would, if necessary, die for the wives. So how do we model Jesus' love for our wives if we can't actually give our lives for them? What we can do is to model other aspects of the gospel toward them. There were other things wrapped up in his death that husbands can emulate.

3. Jesus' love was undeserved.

The gospel literally means the Good News but there is no good news without bad news. If we don't have cancer, we'll never take chemo. If we are not sinners then we'll never need a Savior. Our utterly lost state made us incapable of saving ourselves. Romans 5:8 says that *God demonstrated his love for that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While* we were still sinners. There was nothing about us that caused him to love us.

But this is not how we normally love, is it? Why do we fall in love? That in itself is a strange phrase—fall in love. We might fall into infatuation but no one falls in love. Love develops over time. But even then, we come to love someone because they are inherently lovable. There is something that draws you to this person.

I just read World magazine's article about Rachael Denhollander and her husband, Jacob. Long before they ever met, they had already exchanged 900 pages of emails talking mostly about a Biblical worldview and theology. They were drawn to one another because of their mutual commitment to Christ. They essentially fell in love with the deep faith of each other. There was something lovable about the other that drew them together.

That is typical human love. But this was not Christ's love. His love had no conditions upon us. His love did not wait for us to love back or to do anything to earn his love. We were hopeless. We were helpless. We were 100% undeserving of his love.

This kind of love is even beyond what is normally called unconditional love. Unconditional love is not love that is completely undeserved, but it is love that tends to be very sacrificial. It's love that ignores a really bad day in the other person. It's love that takes a lot of punishment but still stays strong. But when you think about it, if love is deserved, is it fully love? If I do nice things for Karen, somewhere in the back of my mind I know that this will be credited to my account. It's not that I am motivated out of selfishness, but neither is my act fully unselfish. Even if I get a small "thank you," that is something in return. If I do the dishes it's only a small dent in all of the things Karen has done around the house or on behalf of our family on that day. In general, it's easy to love Karen. I don't have to work that hard at it. And in whatever small ways I love her, most or all of them are deserved. They aren't very unconditional nor are they sacrificial.

So does that mean that your wife has to be a real piece of work before you can love her like Christ loved the church? How can I love my wife with undeserved love if in one sense, she

always deserves it? Can sacrificial love only be expressed within really bad marriages? A husband's love will never be exactly the same as Christ's love for the church, will it? Unless you are the prophet Hosea and you married the always faithless Gomer, a wife will almost always deserve a husband's love in some way. But if we look at it in smaller bites, we can still see sacrificial love. There are countless times when a spouse will not be "deserving" but you love anyway. In those times, you need to do the right thing for the right reason and leave the results to God. You don't wait around for your spouse to behave in a certain way which will cause you to want to love them. Your love is not a feeling. Love is fundamentally action. Love is doing. It doesn't matter how you feel at that moment of difficulty. You simply choose to act. You ask the Lord to overcome any negative emotions you may be feeling. You ask the Lord for supernatural strength to do what needs to be done, and then you act. You show love with no conditions attached.

4. Jesus' love was effective.

We did not deserve his love. His love did not have conditions with it because we brought nothing to the table, but we need to make sure we understand that Jesus' love was effective. It did not just potentially do something, it had its intended effect. We were sanctified. We were washed with water by the word. We were made holy and without blemish. We were taken from the kingdom of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of light. In other words, Jesus' love was not wasted. It was not an aimless trajectory. It hit the target dead center. His love supernaturally and forever changed us. Paul described this love to Titus.

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior..." (Titus 3:4-6)

But men, we are not Jesus. How is our love supposed to make a difference in the lives of our wives? Plus, every marriage book or seminar I have ever read has said, "Don't try to change your spouse. Just worry about yourself." Can our love, even through Jesus supernatural power, be effective toward our wife? Will it make a difference? Is that even a valid motive for love?

Listen to Peter's advice for wives. "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct." (1 Peter 3:1-2)

So the clear implication here is that when Godly wives love their husbands unselfishly and with all faith, they can actually "win over" their husbands. In other words, a believing wife, humanly speaking, can be the number one reason a husband gets saved. Now this is not an excuse to engage in missionary dating, in the hopes that you will convert your boyfriend or girlfriend. That's just foolishness. But it does mean that our love can be effective. We can't force change but loving as Christ loved can powerfully impact those we love.

Twenty years ago I repented. When was the last time you repented? Actually, I repent of things about every day but what happened twenty years ago was pretty huge. I went to a discipleship conference that was also a prophecy conference. I was writing my ordination paper and I was

really wrestling with the issue of miraculous gifts. I had read several books and dug deep into the Scriptures, but I still was not content with my thinking on the issue. So, I went to the conference looking for some more answers but I got an answer to a question I was not asking. The speaker had an altar call and I went forward bawling. What sin had I committed? What had this young pastor done to require such tearful repentance? The topic was gentleness and the Holy Spirit convicted me that I was sorely lacking in it.

Men, there aren't too many of us who are known for our gentleness. Harshness, impatience and anger, yes. Gentleness, not so much. But this is a vital foundation to loving as Chris loved the church. Gentleness is a conduit of love. It opens a pathway. It prepares the heart to love when our flesh does not want to express love. Repentance, belief and then love. That's the power of Christ in us.

Rich Maurer
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