

What is Love and How Do We Show It?

Ricardo Campos, Teaching Elder Grace Chapel, Orange, CA April 3, 2011

I. Introduction

Love is a sacred thing that runs deeper than a yearning in the pit of your stomach. It is a willingness to be trampled on for the sake of another, to suffer and die for the life of another. This is what God calls husbands and wives to do for each other. He wants them to die so the other might live. Thus, He commands wives to submit, even when their husbands don't deserve it, and husbands to honor their wives as the treasured counterparts that they are.

II. What is Love?

Is love your heart racing a million beats a minute, butterflies in your stomach, or when you long for the person the way you long for the air you breathe? Is this what love is? Love will include such strong emotions, but these alone are mere attraction. However, when you get past attraction and begin sharing intimacy, love at its core is a willingness to give up your life for the other person in every way.

In 1 Corinthians 12–14 Paul chastises the Corinthians for misusing the gift of tongues. He wants them to think of others and not themselves. So he begins talking about love. When he describes it in 13:4–8a, he uses sixteen characteristics. You can boil them down to one word: *self-sacrifice*. Thus, love is willingly sacrificing yourself for someone else.

God reveals what love is, but He also shows us. First, He reveals that He is love, 1 John 4:8. And since love is self-sacrifice, He demonstrates it: He sacrificed His Son for us that we might live, 1 John 4:9–10. But it goes deeper than this: God in the form of Jesus Christ is love personified. He is love walking on two legs. He willingly laid down His life for us, 1 John 3:16 (Rom. 5:8).

As husbands and wives, Christ gives us an example to follow when loving our spouse. Christ died for His wife in order that she might live, Ephesians 2:14–16. So He urges all of us to die for each other, Ephesians 5:1–2, and more specifically as husbands and wives, Ephesians 5:21–33.

III. How Do We Show Love Toward Each Other in Marriage?

1 Peter 3:1–6, at first glance submissiveness for the wife seems oppressive. She must keep her mouth shut, even if her husband is disobeying God. Is this what God has in mind for wives? No!

God tells wives to “likewise” be submissive to their own husbands. Like what, i.e., in what manner? The answer is found in 1 Peter 1:1–2:25. Peter is writing to people who've been uprooted from their homeland and are facing various trials. The temptation is great to go back to their former behavior, so he urges them to instead be holy in all their conduct, 1 Peter 1:15.

Therefore, Peter urges them to submit in every area of their lives, especially when treated unjustly. So their conduct must be “honorable among the Gentiles,” even though they speak evil against them. They must submit themselves to every governing authority, which will “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men,” 1 Peter 2:15. They must submit to their masters, especially when they are beaten unjustly. Finally, God tells them to follow the ultimate example of self-sacrifice: His Son. Jesus Christ willingly gave up His life without retaliating in order that we might live.

This is how wives are to submit to their husbands. God wants them to do this “without a word.” Does this mean they must remain silent? No. God designed the woman to be man’s helper. At times help means speaking up; other times it means shutting up. When her husband is disobeying God more talk will not help. So, the wife finds herself wanting to speak in the worst way. But it is precisely at this moment that God wants her to die for her husband and crucify her tongue. If she obeys, God tells her that her reverent “chaste conduct” may win over her husband’s disobedience.

Then God addresses what wives are to wear. Can a woman dress in fine clothing? Yes, Proverbs 31:22. However, God is more concerned about what she wears on the inside. She must be adorned with a “gentle and quiet spirit,” 1 Peter 3:4. What does this mean? Was the model wife in Proverbs 31 silent? No. God tells us what He means by “quiet spirit” when He points to the other holy women of Scripture, like Sarah. Was Sarah a quiet little mouse? Some picture Abraham as a ragtag Bedouin roaming the desert with a pup tent, a few sheep, and a mousy wife. Is this who he was? Is this who Sarah was?

Genesis 14:14; 20:14 and 23:6 reveal that Abraham was a warrior king who had 4,000 to 5,000 people under his command, a group that was larger than some cities in Abraham’s day. He was not seen as a weak man, but a “mighty prince.” His wife, then, would’ve been a warrior queen, a woman to be reckoned with. To be the daughter of such a woman (as God calls wives to be, 1 Peter 3:6) is a high, high calling. Thus, to have a “gentle and quiet spirit” does not mean silent, but wise and tempered in your speech. Finally, God encourages wives not to be intimidated by their high calling or their unruly husband because God is watching over them, 1 Peter 2:25; 3:5.

1 Peter 3:7, how are husbands to love their wives? They must die for their wives in the same manner that wives are to die for their husbands, especially by imitating Christ’s self-sacrificial death. Thus, God calls them specifically to live with them “with understanding.” The husband must understand who she is inside and out (likes/dislikes, hopes/dreams, etc.). And he must understand that she is not one of his male buddies, but his queen who deserves his honor. He must treat her like fine china and not Tupperware realizing that as individuals she is his equal before God. If the husband fails to die for his wife this way, God will NOT hear his prayers.

What if my husband beats me? Since the wife must submit “without a word,” does that mean she must silently accept abuse? No, as we’ve seen God doesn’t intend for wives to remain silent. Not only can she speak, she has other recourse against any ill treatment by her husband. She can approach him as a fellow brother in Christ and confront his sin, even calling on the Church to address the matter, Matthew 18:15–17. She can also involve the authorities God ordained to address his criminal behavior, Romans 13:1–4.

What if I’ve fallen out of love with my spouse? God made us to be attracted to one another and fall in love. But just because we can, doesn’t mean we should. Marriage and love are sacred things that run deep, which is why it’s so devastating when such relationships end. If you’re married and you’ve fallen in love with someone else and your love for them is stronger than your love for your spouse, then you’ve failed to protect the intimacy that solely belongs to your spouse and you’ve held back part of your intimacy from your spouse.

IV. Conclusion

When God tells wives to submit, He intends for them to be strong not weak. Sometimes this strength will be revealed in silence, sometimes in speaking up. When God tells the husband to honor his wife, He wants him to honor her for who she is, his precious queen.