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**School of Prayer**

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Chapter 12. Romans chapter 12. To begin, let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, Lord, I come before you and I pray that you would help us to be not simply servants of God, but sons of God, pleasing to you in our dealings with the daughters of God that you have entrusted to us. Of all the things, Lord, in my life that bring about the greatest trembling, Lord, it would not be my failure in ministry, but my failure with your dear daughter. Oh, dear God, help us through the Scriptures, through the power of the Holy Spirit to be pleasing to you in this area of our lives, to lay down our lives for the person that you have given us that you love so dearly. Father, please help me to say a word. Direct us through this, Lord.*

*And, Lord, I don't pray for eloquence of words or to even fulfill my time given to me. But, oh Lord, that we would see the seriousness of that great thing that has been entrusted to us. Help us, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

As I have said, it is a great privilege to speak here. It is a great privilege to speak about the glory of God and it is a fearful thing to preach about marriage, about marriage, about marriage. It is fearful in this regard. If you worked for me, I was the CEO and owner of a certain company and you worked for me and you weren't that effective, you had some problems I might even lose some productivity because of you, well, I would probably be willing to work with you a few more years trying to instill in you characteristics of a good worker, of a good employee. I would still have hope that I would be able to do something with you. I would not become exceedingly angry with you no matter how much you failed in my enterprise.

But if you were my top employee and half the income of my company was because of you and yet you were also my son-in-law and you mistreated my daughter there wouldn't be a place on the face of the earth that you could hide.

The point that I am trying to make with this is this. You are fearful about your ministries? You take great stock and great pride in the fact that you are a careful servant of the most high God? Don't think that is a great thing. Beware how you treat his daughter. Beware how you treat his daughter because I want to assure you that although your ministry might mean more to you than his daughter, your ministry does not mean more to him than his daughter.

We have been raised in an age of big pastors with big ministries who do big things, big preachers who say big words. Any fool can make a church grow and a lot of churches are growing nowadays with a lot of fools guiding the wheel. Any fool can be eloquent.

The spirituality of a man can be determined by so many things and most of them are not wise. You want to know the spirituality of a man? Look at his wife. You want to know the spirituality of a man? See how he acts in her presence when no one else is around. There you will know the extent of this man's profession.

In Romans 12—which might seem quite an unusual place—but I want us to look at something because I want to cut some dragons. I want to take their heads off at the very beginning. In chapter 12 verse one and two you are all so familiar with it, but let's just go to look at two. "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."<sup>1</sup>

Now notice. One of the attributes of God's will, it is perfect. It is not out of balance. It is a perfect thing. There is no flaw. There is no error. It is not one sided, lop sided. It is perfect in all its ways. Hold it up to the light you will not find one flaw with regard to the will of God.

Now in light of that truth, let's look at the boasts of some ministers.

"I had to put my family on the altar of sacrifice for the sake of the ministry. For the sake of the work of God I had to neglect my family. Couldn't spend as much time with family as maybe I ought to have spent because I was busy doing the will of God."

You are making a declaration that God's Word is not true. You are denying the very thing that God speaks forth in this passage. God's will is perfect. That means, dear sir, you do not have to violate one aspect the will of God in order to fulfill another aspect of that same will. If in God's good providence he has given you a wife and that is his will, then his will is perfect and you do not have to neglect that wife in order to carry out your vocation. And if you do you are either not understanding God or you are not really working for his kingdom, you are working to build your own, working to build your own.

Now look at this. How many times in my...as a minister I would have to say still young ministerial life have I heard men speak this way? And they do not realize that they are blaspheming the name of God. They are saying that God's will is not perfect.

"I have children and they are a gift from God, but I don't have time for them because I am must do God's will."

How absurd is that? How absurd!

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 12:2

We might be running wildly in the ministry doing all that we can possibly because we do not understand grace and we still have a works mentality. We might be running wild in ministry doing all that we can working too much because we fear men. We might be running wild and working too much because we love to have a reputation of a very tired, worn out servant of God. We may be running too much because we want to build our own kingdoms. We might be running too much because we don't understand God's will nor our place in that will.

The first thing that you must understand is this. God does not need a one of you. Now that might make you angry, but that is a very liberating thought to me. If I were to perish before I finished in this pulpit, God's kingdom is not going to be halted one bit. The ministry does not depend upon you. You do not have to go out there and save God's work. You simply have to be obedient. And obedience in the kingdom—and the Puritans were very good at this. If you read Thomas Watson's *Body of Divinity* you will discover this. He lists several things through which we might glorify God. And one of them is this. To be content with God's providence. And I have found that among ministers, very few are content with God's providence, though they would be if they had a larger ministry.

To be content with God's providence—and I believe that many men in the ministry, their neglect of their wives and their families for the sake of the ministry is simply that they are not content with the place that God has put them.

My dear friend, and I know that seems... “Why is he talking about this? He is supposed to be talking about marriage.” My dear friend I could name the big shot preachers who have put a great amount of condemnation on God's people and a great amount of condemnation on God's ministers.

“Your church is not like...? What's wrong with you? Aren't you evangelizing? You don't have this? What's wrong with you?”

I graduated from a Southern Baptist seminary and was faced in that seminary with a lot of liberalism and God had to come and save me by sending me literally to the country of Peru where the only thing I had was a Bible. But I will never forget. I will never forget. One of the professors, a dear man there, a godly man. He said, “Paul, you don't go to chapel.”

I said, “Sir, it is not required.”

He said, “You don't go to chapel.” He says, “I know your prayer life. I know that you work with street people, you even live with them.” He says, “But you don't go to...why don't you go to chapel?”

I said, “When you bring a man who has been pasturing 35 people for 45 years into this chapel to preach to me I will come.” I said, “But as long as the only people who get to speak in this chapel are men with churches of over 1000 I have no place here. When

your definition of what it means to be a man of God changes, I'll come to chapel." And I believe that was on my heart and that because it is biblical and it is true.

Many times, men, we are neglecting weightier matters of the law, particularly our wives and our children because we always feel...some of you have lived your entire life under a bondage that you are not the man of God that you wish you could have been, that something is wrong with you and everything else because you are not some kind of international speaker or you don't have a church that can give conferences to tell everyone else how to do it. And that is a lie straight out of the pit of hell.

Have you been faithful to God's will? Because I have got news for all the big shots. You don't always grow when you are faithful. You don't always grow when you do the right things. Look at the prophets. They did the right things. They were stoned. Look at Christ. He ascended to heaven with 11 disciples.

And what I am trying to tell you is this. God has a will for your life. But so many ministers measure their obedience and their walk with God not by seeing if they are balance din that will, obedient in that will, but looking at their ministries and the supposed earthly success of them. And this has to be addressed before we can talk about marriage. It must.

I know so many men that are godlier than I that know more than I. They forgot more about God than I will ever know; some of you probably here.

I always ask myself. "Why is this brother preaching in this small place and no one knows about and why am I standing before 5000 people?" When I have a problem I call that man up and he tells me things I could have never even dreamed of.

Do you know what it is? It is the providence of God. And it is God using the ignoble and the unwise to confound the noble and the wise, the weak to confound the strong. And the first truth you must come to grips with if you are ever going to be the man of God for the glory of God in your marriage is simply this. Come out from under these false ideas of what it means to be a success in the ministry and seek to be an obedient child of God come what may, come what may.

How many men of God in the Bible, the great patriarchs of the faith had families so messed up it was unbelievable? Would you really want to have King David come and teach you a conference on marriage? Would you want Abraham to do so? Would you would Isaac here? Or what about Jacob?

You see, my dear friends, your approval, God's approval of you before the throne will not depend as much on your ministry as you think. It will depend on lots of other things. He cares more about that daughter he gave you than he does about the ministry he gave you. I mean ministries are impersonal things. He can get donkeys to talk for him. He gave you a daughter.

Now let's turn just briefly to Romans chapter eight. The working of God in a marriage.

Now most of you, this probably won't affect you as much, but maybe it will help you teach others, younger men when they come to you, your sons when they come to you. And I want us to look at verse 28 of chapter eight of Romans.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.<sup>2</sup>

Now, every thing that God is doing in our life is for our good. That's number one. Number two, our good is quite different from what many people think. Our good, the good that God is working all things towards is to conform us to the image of his Son, the image of his Son.

God is sovereign over all things, sovereignly working in our life and he is doing all these things—everything, not some things, all things—why? In order to conform us to the image of Christ.

Now, step back here for a moment. A young man walks into my office and he says, "I want to marry this girl."

And I say, "Why?"

And he says, "Well, I am attracted to her. I like being around her. When I am with her, when, you know, I feel good. We can talk. We get along. We like to serve the Lord together. She is just such a blessing to my life. I just want to marry her."

And I say, "Well, young man, let me just see if I have interpreted you correctly. You want to marry this girl because she meets all your selfish self centered needs. Is that right? Is that what you are telling me?"

And he goes, "No, that's not what I said."

I said, "That's exactly what I said. What happens, young man, when you can't talk to her and some other woman comes along with whom you can discuss things? Are you gone? She's beautiful."

"Yes, she is beautiful."

"What happens when she is not as beautiful? And what happens when the devil sends around another woman who is more beautiful? And he will. What then?"

He said, "Pastor, I see what you mean."

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:28-29

Well, I hope so.

Now what is the basis for marriage? The providence and will of God.

You see, here is how it works. Marriage is not unlike the calling into ministry. It is not unlike it. It is the basis of it at least. And what is that? God has called me with an irrevocable calling to lay down my life for a specific daughter of his. That is all there is to it.

Now I know I have taken a lot of the romance out of it, but the foundation of the whole thing needs to be strong before we start speaking about romance. God has called, from heaven God has called me to lay down my life, to die for this daughter that he has appointed, that he has ordained.

“But where is the escape hatch? Where is the exit?”

There is none.

“Well, what about me?”

What about you? Can you not entrust yourself to the sovereignty and providence of God?

You see, it works like this. Now look at my marriage. Now look at it.

“My wife is beautiful.”

Wonderful. Glorious benefit. Praise the Lord.

“But my wife is deformed in a terrible car accident. She can do nothing but drool. Where do I go?”

Nowhere. Why? God has called me to lay down my life for this daughter of his.

“My wife and I can talk. Oh, we can talk all night.”

Wonderful, benefit. Glory! God has blessed you.

“My wife and I have trouble talking,” let’s say. “We get into a discussion and not even five minutes it seems like we begin to pick at each other,” let’s say someone says. “Well, you know, we just...we don’t have any fellowship. It just seems like we are completely two different personalities and everything else. Where do I go?”

Absolutely nowhere.

“Why?”

You have been called of God to lay down your life for this daughter of his—period.

Do you see how the sovereignty of God works? It is why I disagree with most books written on marriage today. I disagree with most of this. Because they are wrong. And why are they wrong? They say the goal of marriage is to achieve this thing where you are walking into marital bliss. It is not the goal of marriage. It is to conform you to the image of Christ. That is the goal of marriage.

Now, in God’s sovereignty this is what he has done. He has given you a woman in his sovereignty that is strong in all the points where she must be strong so that you are not tempted beyond what you can bear. But also in the sovereignty of God he has given you a woman with divinely orchestrated weaknesses. He has given you a woman where she is weak in some places where you would give your right arm for her not to be weak.

And why? Because his great purpose in your life is to conform you to the image of Jesus Christ. And what is...if we were to sum up this image of Christ, what would we say? Well, what do we sing about? We sing about what? Do we sing about his wrath? Not much. We sing about his unconditional love, his mercy and his grace.

Now here is something about the fall of the world and about your wife. There can’t be unconditional love in a place where someone meets all the conditions.

Someone would say, “Why did the world fall?”

Did you ever want to see mercy? Because if the world hadn’t fallen you would have never seen it and you would have never seen grace either.

The things that God wants to build into your life are Christ likeness, which most manifests itself in unconditional love. As my dear friend Charles Rider told me one time, he said, “Paul in the new covenant love is not something. Love is the thing.”

He wants to teach you unconditional love. He wants to teach you mercy and he wants to teach you grace. And that is why in his good providence for you, he has given you a wife that is not perfectly compatible, a wife that you must at times struggle with, that you must bear with, that you must be patient with and vice versa. I mean you are not exactly the perfect catch either.

But what I want you to see is that so many men who do not understand the sovereignty of God in marriage will think, “Man, I have married a woman that is just so incompatible with me, so different from me and we have so many troubles in this area.” Why? Why? He wants to make you like Jesus. He wants you to love like Christ a woman who does not meet all your conditions. He wants you to show mercy and grace to not give her what she sometimes deserves; that is a hard look. And to give her what she never deserves;

grace upon grace upon grace. God wants to make you like Christ and the primary means of doing it is through your marriage.

You have heard me preach once. What do you think about me? It tells you nothing. Go home with me. Spy through the window of my house. Then you'll understand whether these words are just wind.

You see, this is the point, sir. This is not an impersonal ministry. This is the daughter of God entrusted to you, sovereignly given to you. And God knows about her strengths. God also knows about her weaknesses. And those weaknesses in her that is going to conform you to the image of Christ more than the strengths. And so now, you know, you are sitting there. You are with your wife. You are looking. You are looking at things that are incompatible, things that you would like to have differently, all sorts of things. And sometimes a young man will go to despair. A young man will be depressed. A young man will be bothered about all these things. But a man who knows the Word of God will be able to look and praise God more for the weaknesses in his wife than the strengths because that man knows that those weaknesses have also been divinely appointed in order to do him good, to do him good.

And that is why this passage is so, so very important.

Now let's go to, of course, Ephesians five.

In Ephesians five we usually begin with verse 22, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord."<sup>3</sup>

Now, many liberals have taken this passage and they have mutilated it with verse 21. "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."<sup>4</sup> See, they don't understand that verse 21 in its context is reflecting back on the relationship of believers in the community. And we would all agree with this. We are to submit to one another in the Lord. There is no Lord here, no Christ, no master. There is a real sense in which all of us are submitting to one another. But now he is going to move on in to the area of the family. And in the family submit yourselves one to another turns into, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord."<sup>5</sup>

Now, this text has been denied by liberals, but it has also been taken by Bible believing Christians to enslave women. How do we interpret this? We interpret this passage in the context of what? Of the verse that follows it, which is this, verse 25. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself [up] for it."<sup>6</sup>

Do you know? One time I told someone that as a young man I was young and I went to this big missions conference. I wasn't invited. I just showed up and I had been back from

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 5:22

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 5:21

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 5:22

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 5:25

Peru, been there for a couple of years and I showed up in this missions conference and I don't know why...there was like 700, 800 men there, but the guy heading the thing up said, "Are you Paul Washer?"

I said, "Yes, sir. I am."

He said, "Well, someone told me something about this, this...I would like you to come up and speak for us."

I mean you talk about paralyzed. I was afraid. And then I got up in the pulpit and I turned around. I looked down and Ian Murray is looking back at me. Then I was very afraid.

And I was telling a friend of mine this story and he immediately said, "You should not be afraid to preach before men. You stand before God."

And I said, "Yeah, of course I do. But God is a lot more merciful than men are."

Do you know? I am not afraid...I am afraid to rebel against the Lord. I am not afraid to submit my life totally to him because I know he is trustworthy. I am not afraid. Even if I have to lay down my life, if I have to walk away from house or home or family or whatever I have to do. I am not afraid to do this. He asked me, "Come and die." It is not really that big of an issue. Why? Because of his character, because of who he is.

And so when the Lord says, "Submit to me, Paul," well, I mean, what's so hard about submitting to a perfect master who loves you more than you love yourself? That is the context of this passage commanding women to submit to their husbands.

I would be afraid that there is a real way in which I think my is a brave woman because I would be afraid to submit to someone like me.

You know those passages we take to heart when the Lord says, you know, the master of the house went away and the one he placed over the servants begins to beat them and not give them their food and he comes back and deals harshly, cuts them to pieces he does. Look at that in the context of marriage. And these are not servants. These are daughters. These are daughters.

Yes, this woman of God she has her problems, but this is not a conference about her. It is about you. This is a daughter of God who, yes, she must submit. She has been commanded to submit to you. But you have been commanded to love her as Christ loves the Church. And if she does...if she does not submit to you, then you have very little to be afraid. She is a rebellious woman. If she submits to you be afraid. What [?] you have a sword hanging over you. If this woman gives herself unto you and treats you as her head and you do not live up to that role, you abuse that role, you use it for your advantage or for your ministry, be terrified because she always will be a person just like you before the throne of God. Blood was spilled on Calvary for her.

Let me just...now just listen. Ok? I'll tell you where it is at, but just listen to this.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will [I] give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”<sup>7</sup>

And you say, “What does that have to do with marriage?”

Is this referring only to men or is this referring to all the people of God? It is referring to all the people of God. Anyone who overcomes. Your wife is not an extension of you. She is her own person before the throne of God and one day a white stone will be placed in her hand with a name written on it that you, sir, do not know. She knows it and her Lord knows it, but you do not know it. Do you see what I am saying? You are not connected to everything. You are not the Lord of Lords with her world. She does not only find value before the throne because she is married to you. She is a daughter of God by her own right and by the right of the blood given for her. You have been called to be her head, but do so with fear and trembling.

Now, it says—back to Ephesians five—“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.”<sup>8</sup> That statement is...is ferocious. I mean that statement is so cutting. It has such a blade on it that my wife is to submit to me as she would submit to the very Lord of glory.

You say, “Boy, that ought to be a frightful thing for her.”

No, it is not. It is a frightful thing for me. Look what I can do.

In Peru they...I was with a pastor from the jungle once. He used an illustration of a man in a family who is not submitted totally to the will of God and the fear of the Lord is like a man driving drunken wildly down the Amazon with his entire family in the back and the back of the boat loaded with dynamite. It is true.

Do you realize the responsibility that has been placed upon you? That people are called to submit to you as unto the Lord. It ought to cause you...to whom much is given, much is required.<sup>9</sup> It ought to cause you to live out your life with fear and trembling. If this is a woman who will one day stand before God. This is a woman who will stand there alone without you. This is a woman who will receive a white stone with her name on it that you know nothing of. This is a woman who will be rewarded by God as a handmaiden. And this is a woman that may be the source of your judgment depending on the way you obey Christ.

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<sup>7</sup> Revelation 2:17

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 5:22

<sup>9</sup> See Luke 12:48

Now here is something very important that I am always teaching women. But it is good to teach men at the same time. This care that you are to have of her does not depend on her response to you. That is one of the greatest problems that happens in marriage today. Everyone is waiting...one person is waiting for the other person to be worthy of the treatment they are commanded to give them.

You are to act this way in the fear of Christ because you have been commanded to act this way. We are always telling women, “You are to submit because the Bible says submit. Even if this man doesn’t necessarily deserve such submission, the Lord commands you to submit. It is a thing between you and the Lord.”

In the same way it is a thing between you, sir, and the Lord!

Whether she is a woman who knows as much as the apostle Paul and is as beautiful as a super model or a woman who causes great hardship, it is the same. In the sovereignty and the providence of God you are to rest and you are to be obedient to him. And you are to take this, you are to take this as a great responsibility.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.<sup>10</sup>

Now we love this part. We preach this part quite a bit. The husband is head of the wife.

But, my dear friend, what does this mean? Let’s look at this in the context of what Jesus is telling us that don’t call on any one on earth Christ or Father. There is one Father. There is one teacher. There is one Christ.

Does this passage mean that I just go off and I make every decision that is supposed to be made for my family and then they just come back and just blindly accept it? Is that what that means? That is what some of us would have it to mean. But it...Scripture cannot just be taken out of context.

I would say that the best way to teach this is to illustrate. I say that the Lord...I began to believe that the Lord wants me to go to Siberia and wants my family to move there as a missionary. Well, let’s say that we have to sell our home. I feel like the Lord wants us to sell our home or we want to buy a home or any type of decision whether it be in the secular category or the sacred category even though these two categories no longer exist.

Do I just go and make the decision? No, I don’t. I am one with that woman. Yes, I am head. But what am I going to do? I am going to go to her and I am going to say, “Darling, I have been offered a work in Siberia. I have to make the decision by August third and I really feel like it is God’s will that I go and that we go as a family.”

And if she says, “You know, Paul, I have been praying about this and, man, I think you

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<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 5:22-23

are right.” Well, that’s a great confirmation, isn’t it? But what if she says, “Paul, I’m just not sure about this. Are you sure that you are hearing from God?”

Am I going to take that as an attack on my masculinity? Some men would. Some fine Christian men that have learned well, supposedly, would take that as an attack or a rebellious woman. There was no rebel in her voice. It’s a daughter of God. She didn’t say, “You’re an idiot.” She didn’t say, “There’s no way.” She just said, “I’m not sure about this.”

Do you know in some circles of Christianity, fundamental Christianity, fundamentalists and I am one, I guess you could say. I don’t know what I am. I believe the Bible. In some circles that would be treated as rebellion. Well, I am glad I am not in those circles.

She humbly and lovingly had a problem. And do you know what I am going to do as the man of God? I’ll tell you what I am going to do. My wife has been right a lot of times. I am going to...a red flag immediately is going to go up in my heart and I am going to go, “Well, then I am going to give more time to prayer. I am going to pray with you. And then whatever you feel like the Lord is telling you, you know, just let me know.”

And let’s say that we finally come to unity on the thing. Praise the Lord. Let’s say that we don’t. But I still feel strongly that we must go. I must make the decision today. It must be made.

My dear friend, I have to make it. As the man I am called upon to make that decision. Now I have counseled with my wife. I have done everything. And I am going to go to her and I am going to say, “Honey, in this particular issue right now we are not in agreement, but we have to make the decision. And I am the head of the home and I have got to make it. It is a call I have to make. I am going to make it.”

Now what is she to do? She is required to follow her husband. She is.

Now I haven’t lorded it over her. I haven’t treated her as some insignificant part of my life or an extension just of me. What I have done is this. I have counseled with her. I have asked for her help. I have asked for her thoughts. But if push comes to shove and a decision has to be made, yes, I must make that decision. But rare has it ever been that case.

Usually when there is not unity and there is not a deadline we don’t do it. We don’t do it. I am talking about an extreme, extreme situation. And then what if we do make that decision, she submits to it even though she doesn’t agree with it and I am right and she sees later on that I am right. Should I glory over her? No.

But what if I am wrong? Should I deny it if it comes to light that I am wrong in that decision I have made? Should I deny it? No. I should say I am wrong. And should she glory over me? Absolutely not.

See, we need to be very, very careful. Some men take this passage and they don't treat it as Christ would, they treat it as the Gentiles do, lording it over others, holding it over others and that is not the way.

Now, let's go further because I am trying to cram in seven different lectures in this one thing.

Now we always talk about us being the head of our wives like Christ is the head of the Church. Do you really want that responsibility? How does Christ exercise his lordship over the Church? Have you ever sat down and tried to think of that? Have you ever met a Lord and a master who was...who showed greater kindness than the Lord of the Church? Have you ever met a master who was more gentle, more patient? Have you ever met anyone who put up with all your failures in such a loving way as the one who is Lord over the Church?

You see, we forget. We think that it is just submit to me as though I were Christ. But at the same time we are supposed to act like Christ. And how does Christ lord over his Church? With thunderbolts and lightnings and demands? No. Most of the time he spends wooing his Church, doesn't he? Loving her, wooing her, patient with her, kind with her.

If she makes one tiny step forward after 300 steps backward all of heaven breaks out and applauds. Do you really want Christ to treat the Church like you treat your wife? We would all be in hell.

You see, look what it says. "As Christ is the head of the church."<sup>11</sup>

I pointed out when I began preaching here in the first part of the last meeting I said, "You know, all my failures and yet God continues on. All my weaknesses and yet his faithfulness prevails." That is a description of the Church and its relationship with the Lord.

Isn't it amazing? The beatitudes, the one statement and command that shows how believers truly still struggle with the flesh is this, when he commands us to be merciful. Isn't it unbelievable, almost unspeakable that a group of people like us that have received such mercy from God must then be commanded to be merciful to one another? That we could withhold mercy from anyone after what has been given us is unbelievable, especially with regard to our wives.

Never forget. You will usually treat your assistant pastor or some person you work with at the pastor with more dignity and kindness than you will the people closest to you. We take so much for granted. Would you treat your best friends as you would treat that wife?

Now here is something that is a remarkable statement. Not only is Christ the head of the Church, but Christ is "the saviour of the body."<sup>12</sup> He is its savior. I want to tell you there

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<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 5:23

is a real sense, sir, in which you are to be—for the glory of God—the savior of your wife. There is a real sense.

See, we are always...why do I always go to marriage conferences, hear everybody preaching about how the man is the head of the woman, but I never hear them saying that he is the savior of the woman?

You say, “Well, there is only one savior.”

There is only one head, too. But there is a real sense in which we are heads of our wives and saviors of her body.

I always tell men this and it is so true. If after 10 years of marriage your wife is not any more pleasing to you than after the first year of marriage, it is you who have failed. You have been brought into the life of that woman in a sense to be her savior.

Now, salvation as we understand it biblically is not just a past tense thing. You have been saved. You are being saved. And one day you will be saved. In the same way this work of sanctification that the Lord is doing in his church, you are to be doing in the life of your wife, saving her. You are to be an instrument in her conformity to Christ.

Now, again, I have got to back up here. Why? Because to some men that means sitting your wife down and badgering her, throwing verses at her, rebuking her, telling her to go to this conference and that conference and every other conference.

How to have a better wife? I’ll tell you, become more Christ like.

You have a woman who is not grateful? Then you be grateful for absolutely everything good in her life and allow her to see it. Be grateful for everything that is put on the table. Be grateful for every little thing that she does that is positive and is a work of obedience.

You have a wife who is not merciful? Be merciful to her.

You see, you and I are called alongside her not just to bear her. We are called alongside her to promote her godliness, to promote her standing in the kingdom, to promote her conformity to Christ. That is our task. You are out there trying to save the whole world, but what about your wife? And what does it matter if a man gain the whole world and lose his wife?

It is a relational sort of thing. It is sitting down with her. It is talking about Scripture. It is praying together. It is working through problems.

It seems like we just have two extremes today in American Christianity, one is a liberal view that is just, “Don’t do anything and you are both just partners and no one is the head and just that’s it.” And then there is the other view that the woman is like to walk behind

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

three steps behind the husband. When she gets out of life show her those principles you learned in the seminar.

No. Show her Christ. Show her Jesus Christ. Overwhelm her.

Let me give you a perfect example. I learned this right after I was saved with my sister. She is not here so I can share this illustration. Just don't let her get this tape into her hands.

My sister, she is...women. I don't know. I was raised on a farm. You go in a bathroom it looks like a torture chamber in there. They have got things to curl their hair, straighten their hair, do this, do that, everything else. I mean look...just the plugs going everywhere.

And I am in there and I am washing my face. I want to go somewhere and I see something plugged up and I pulled the plug out. I thought, "I don't want to cause a fire hazard or anything. This thing is turned on. No one is using it. I don't know what it is for. It looks like an iron or something." I pull it out.

I go in my room, finish dressing. Everything fine.

All of the sudden my sister shows up. I hear a scream like none other outside of the gates of hell and then she runs towards my door, hair going in every direction. Terrified me. I'm a bold man, but not that strong. Terrified me.

She goes, "You idiot. I'm late. I've got to curl my hair. I've got to do...what is wrong you stupid. Leave things alone."

Now, normally prior to conversion I would have been right back up in her face. And the battle would be on. But for some reason, miracle. I went, "You know, you're right. I am very sorry for unplugging your thing."

And she went...and she was mad because she couldn't get mad. She was mad because I didn't do what she wanted me to do so she could justify her actions against me.

How many times...how many times have I come in from ministry having to deal with so many silly problems with silly people, just flustered with everything? Come in, you know, it is seven o'clock. Meal is not ready because one of the boys got sick or something.

And I am sitting there and I go, "Where's the food? I mean I come home. You know, there is no food. I am tired. I mean, you know, what have you been doing all day?"

I know none of you have ever done anything like that. And if she turns around and gives it to me up one end and down the other the battle is on. But if she turns around and she says, "Paul, I am so sorry. I am sorry...Ian is just sick and I just...let me...let me take care of this one thing and I'll have..."

When she does that I go, “Excuse me.” I go outside and right by my shed I have this oak two by four. And I stay out there for about an hour. If you have ever heard screams coming from the north, it’s me. And I beat myself and I sit there and it is just what the Bible says. With her kindness, her Christ likeness, she has heaped hot coals on my head.<sup>13</sup>

And it is the same way. You come home. And maybe she has been slothful in some thing. Then pick it up. Pick it up. And don’t do it like...start cleaning the house and making all kinds of noise just so she knows that she hasn’t done her job. See, I know you. You are like me.

No. To be a savior...and how is that? Look at this in 25. He says, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.”<sup>14</sup> Brother, Jesus doesn’t command you. He gave himself for the Church. He doesn’t command you to do it. He gave himself for the Church and he is enough. Ok? He didn’t command you to give yourself for the Church. He said, “I have done it and it is finished.”<sup>15</sup> Now you give yourself to your wife.

We have been dabbling in places we shouldn’t be.

“I just gave my life for that church.”

But you weren’t supposed to.

You know, if God calls me to be a janitor in Brooklyn and I go to Nigeria and plant 300 churches I am out of the will of God. God commanded you to lay down your life for his daughter, for his daughter. And you can’t lay yourself down for the Church anyways. Do you want to know why? For the same reason you can’t pull yourself up by your own boot straps. You can’t lay yourself down for the Church because you are part of the Church. You are the Church. He laid down his life for you. Now go lay down your life for your wife.

And guess what? There is a lot of glory in laying down your life for a church because other people will admire how big your church is, how beautiful it is and everything else. But there is very little glory because it is very...very rarely is it publicized when a man lays down his life for his wife. Usually the only one who knows it—many times she won’t even know it—the only one who will know it is God. And that is enough. Lay down your life for your wife.

And, again, I just wish I could do...there’s...there’s four hours right there.

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<sup>13</sup> See Proverbs 25:21-22

<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 5:25

<sup>15</sup> See John 19:30

Now in 26, “That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.”<sup>16</sup>

Now, notice. He doesn't come to us here with this fire and hammer Jeremiah illustration. Ok? He could have done that. It is a biblical illustration of the application of the Word, words like a hammer, words like fire. He didn't use that here. Why? Fire and hammers can be trusted in God's hands. They can't be trusted in yours.

That's a good word.

I make archery equipment, wooden bows, to hunt with. And I have made my boy when he was one year old he had his first bow. But I didn't put very sharp broadheads in his hand because he doesn't...he would kill himself with them, kill somebody else.

In the same way when it talks about you dealing with your wife, he doesn't say, “The fire of the Word the hammer of the Word, breaking...”

No, he uses us. He says, “Washing of water by the word.”<sup>17</sup> Washing. It is a pleasant thing, a very pleasant thing. It's soft, it's warm. Do you see?

I have seen so many seminars on marriage that literally if they would have allowed me to get up in the pulpit I would have grabbed every one of their little folders and thrown them right out of the window and burned them in a pile and preached against everybody in the building. And I want to tell you why. Because women aren't supposed to be treated that way, that's why. That's why.

Yes, women are to submit. Yes, they are in certain biblical ways, biblical ways. But oh what leaders we are to be. We are to be like Christ?

I know of a man in Missouri that literally psychopath in his home. I mean, it was unbelievable. He almost killed everyone in his family with his ideas of submission and this and that. But he was very selective in his reading, very religious, but not pious. No love. No devotion. No mercy. No grace. Just rules. Demands, hammers, fire, blow torch in his case, flame thrower. His wife had even begun to believe she wasn't even a person before God anymore.

That is not of Christ. And he says, “Sanctify and cleanse with the washing of the word.”<sup>18</sup> Your sanctification...how long have you been a Christian? How long has this sanctification been going on in your life?

If your wife doesn't get it after one year throw her out and then go to hell because that is exactly where you are going.

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<sup>16</sup> Ephesians 5:26

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See Ephesians 5:26

The Lord...some of you men...one brother here said he has been a Christian for how many years, brother?

Voice: Over 40.

Over 40 years, the Lord has been teaching him the same things. Over 40 years the Lord has...I don't know him or well enough to say this, but I just know this about the Christian life. Over 40 years the Lord has been teaching him something, he has learned it and he has forgotten it and the Lord has taught it to him again and again and again and again and again and again and again. And guess what? Until the day of glory he will not give up.

A wonderful passage in James. Ask the Lord for wisdom because he gives wisdom without rebuke, without reproach.<sup>19</sup>

You say, "What does that have to do with marriage?"

Well, here is what James is talking about. You need wisdom. You go to God. You ask for wisdom. He gives it to you. You don't use it. You get messed up again. You go back and ask him for more wisdom. He gives it to you without scolding you for what you did with what he gave you first of all. He is so patient. And you are to be working in your wife's sanctification praying for her, teaching the Bible to her, together learning the Word.

There is so much your wife can teach you. I didn't even understand Proverbs 31 until my wife taught it to me.

Now, verse 27. This is where we will end. "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."<sup>20</sup> After so many years of marriage can you present your wife to yourself as pleasing? Well, then maybe your work of sanctification hasn't been going on very well.

You see, there is a sense in which the Lord saves us and we are not pleasing to him. We are so immature, so full of self, so many things, so everything wrong with us. But he is working and working and working patiently and one day he will present us to himself and we will be pleasing.

If you look at your wife after so many years of marriage and she is not pleasing, your process of sanctification must be flawed at least some.

Are you actively, consciously involved in your wife's sanctification in a loving, gentle way?

That's a question I ask myself. It is a question often I don't want to answer.

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<sup>19</sup> See James 1:5

<sup>20</sup> Ephesians 5:27

There is a real sense in which on the day...If Paul said that such and such church was his glory at Christ's return, how much more will your wife be your glory on the day of Christ's return?

“Look, Lord, not a talent, but look, Lord, the wife that you gave me and now here she is.”

You think that he gave you a wife and this was the wife he gave you and the wife you are to have. Very little hope of ever seeing her change or be more conformed to the image of Christ. You just need to endure through this marriage until the Lord comes or you go to him.

Well, if you go to the parable of the talents you will see some thing quite different. The Lord has given you this woman that one day you might give her back. Say, “Look, Lord. You gave me one talent. I present to you 10.”

Let's pray.

*Father, I come before you in the name of your Son and I rejoice, Lord, that I am so loved by him. Lord, help me to love my wife. Amen.*