

How to Love Your Spouse

the Way God Wants

Allen Webster

A lady ran a classified ad, stating simply: “Husband wanted.” The next day she received a hundred letters! They all said the same thing: “You can have mine.”

Obviously, these were not Christian marriages.

A person genuinely loved by a spouse has a better chance of going to heaven than a single person or one who is in a dysfunctional marriage. This is not to say that singles, divorced, and unhappily married people cannot do much good in the kingdom and go to heaven when they die. It just points out that Satan has a harder time getting a person with a mate who loves as the Bible instructs. The devil’s incense does not smell as good to one who constantly breathes the fragrance of Christian love. His siren songs fall upon deaf ears when a husband is satisfied at home and when a wife’s heart is filled to the brim with affection.

It is little wonder, then, that Paul instructed wives “to love their husbands” (Titus 2:4), or that he told husbands to love their wives four times in one passage:

Husbands, [1] love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church...So ought men to [2] love their wives as their own bodies. He that [3] loveth his wife loveth himself... let every one of you in particular so [4] love his wife even as himself (Ephesians 5:25–33).

The Bible assumes that couples would love each other and rejoice together (Ecclesiastes 9:9). Isaac loved Rebekah, and she brought comfort into his life (Genesis 24:67). Uriah the Hittite nourished and cherished Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:3). Solomon’s wife was as loving to him as a pet deer (Proverbs 5:19). Solomon, in turn, loved his wives (1 Kings 11:2).

What are the characteristics of spousal love?

Spousal love is sacrificial—no price is too great. One man confessed to a friend that he was afraid he loved his wife too much. His friend asked if he loved her as much as Christ loved the church. He answered no, and his friend said, “You must love her more.”

A husband who understands biblical love would lay down his life for his wife. A wife would do the same for her husband (1 John 3:16; cf. Romans 5:7). It follows logically that one who would make the supreme sacrifice will readily make the smaller sacrifices needed on a daily basis to help a spouse draw nearer to God. Jacob loved Rachel enough to sacrifice fourteen years of his life for her (Genesis 29:20). A husband may not enjoy going to see his wife’s mother, and she may not enjoy watching football every weekend, but these are small sacrifices to make for a good relationship. Personal likes, desires, opinions, preferences, and welfare take a backseat to compatibility, friendship, and long-term closeness.

Spousal love is spiritual—nothing short of eternity together will do. What is the goal of marriage? Is it simply to be happy? No, nothing so shallow as that. Marriage is preparation for eternity. It is a lifelong opportunity for two people to help each other prepare for judgment day. Marriage here is just a trial run at being married to Jesus forever. The aim of each Christian companion is to make sure that his or her spouse makes it to heaven.

Peter coached wives on methods to successfully win their husbands to Christ (1 Peter 3:1–4). Paul taught spouses to look at marriage as missionary work: “For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?” (1 Corinthians 7:16). To a man who worked diligently “that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22), marriage was but another method of evangelism.

On another occasion, Paul pictured Christ as a model for Christian husbands. Since Christ is the “Savior of the body” who sanctified and cleansed His bride, it follows that husbands are to help save their wives by helping them live clean lives (Ephesians 5:23). Spouses could easily paraphrase Paul’s life-guiding

principle to his young friend Timothy, as a desire to “both save ourselves, and those around us” (1 Timothy 4:16). If a man who saves any soul is wise (Proverbs 11:30), then one who saves his most beloved friend is doubly so.

Imagine receiving an invitation to dine with the nation’s president. You look forward to it for months. Perhaps you go on a diet to lose a few pounds. You shop for just the right clothes to dress to impress. The day arrives. She gets her hair fixed that morning and he gets a neat trim. Clothes are pressed; makeup is applied; fragrance is added. When the Secret Service sedan pulls up out front, she looks at him and says, “How do I look?” He slowly examines her from head to toe. He removes a piece of lint from her skirt, a stray hair from her shoulder, smooths a wrinkle from her jacket, and points out that she is about to forget her handbag. In turn, he asks, “Am I presentable?” She smooths his hair in the back, straightens his tie, and reminds him to clean his glasses. Neither of them resented the other’s actions. They were glad for the assistance to help them make the best appearance.

Now consider that you and I have an invitation to a far more prestigious event. We will soon dine with the King of kings (Revelation 19:7–9). On the day we meet King Jesus, it will not be about hairstyles, tuxedos, or matching accessories. It is about character, deeds, and the “beauty of holiness” (1 Chronicles 16:29). The Lord will not be concerned with fancy dresses and make-up; He will look at the “hidden man of the heart” for a “meek and quiet spirit” (1 Peter 3:3–4). Our spouses help us look our best on that great, final day when the whole world will be watching (Matthew 25:31–33).

Paul says that the Lord will “present” His bride on that day (Ephesians 5:27). He is now working to make her glorious, “not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing . . . holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:26–27). In ancient Greece, a bride-to-be was ceremonially cleansed by bathing in a river. Whatever her life had been before, it was now symbolically purified. She thus entered marriage without any moral or social blemish—the past was washed away. This is what Christ does for us at baptism (Acts 22:16).

Spousal love is relentless—no road is too long. Love finds a way. It is creative and longsuffering. To use Paul's words, love "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth" (1 Corinthians 13:7-8). The four friends of a palsied man illustrate love's creativity. When they could not get to Jesus through a door or window, they climbed up and broke through the roof (Mark 2:4). Love refuses to give up until a spouse is ready for heaven. Love never lets a mate slow up in the Christian race, or give up in the fight with the devil (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

Spousal love is comprehensive—no sin is safe. Paul refers to removing spots and wrinkles, which is a clothing metaphor (Ephesians 5:27). As a garment brought home from the cleaners has spots removed and wrinkles pressed out, so two Christians long married are cleansed and groomed to meet the Master.

The figure may also refer to an aging body that becomes spotted and wrinkled. Since spots are external and wrinkles are caused by internal decay, the figure applies to spouses helping each other overcome both obvious flaws and hidden secrets (Psalm 19:12).

Spouses have a unique perspective and opportunity to help us successfully prepare to meet King Jesus. They know us the best; they are around us the most; they understand our strengths and weaknesses. They likely know our secret sins and carefully masked character flaws. Thus they are in the best position to help us "spruce up" before going to the marriage feast.

Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). This applies in three ways:

(1) *Spouses believe the best about each other* (1 Corinthians 13:7; Proverbs 18:13). A loving person is not a suspicious person. Love "thinketh no evil" (1 Corinthians 13:5). One definition of *think* here is to "suppose" (twice translated this way in the New Testament). Love does not suspect evil of others; it does not imagine evil, nor charge guilt by influence. It minds its own business. Love tries to put the best construction on everything. Thus a wife does not automatically assume that her husband is having an affair because he gets home an hour late from work one day. (Perhaps there was an accident on the interstate.) He does not jump to the conclusion that she is

leaving him because she cuts a phone conversation short when he walks into a room. (Perhaps she was planning a surprise birthday party for him.)

(2) *Spouses protect the reputation of each other.* Love does not gossip to others about a loved one's sin (Proverbs 10:12; 12:16; 17:9). A husband who loves his wife will not make her the butt of biting jokes. A wife who loves her husband will not bare his faults in a gossip session with her social circle.

(3) *Spouses seek to get sins covered by Christ's blood.* James wrote, "Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:20). Chrysostom observed that a wrong done against love is like a spark that falls into the sea and is quenched. Spiritually minded mates encourage their spouses to go to bed with a clean conscience each night, for it could be the night that Jesus returns. If sin enters one's life, the other urges repentance immediately, before the devil can entrench his ways deeper into their family.

Shenandoah sang a popular song entitled, "I Want to Be Loved Like That."

Daddy never gave Momma a diamond ring
Momma never worried for anything
What he gave her came from the heart
A bond that was never torn apart
An old man kneeling all alone
Plants his flowers in a garden of stone
For seven years now she's been gone
And his devotion is still going strong
I want to be loved like that,
A promise you can't take back,
If you're gonna love me,
I want to be loved like that

We would all like to be loved like that. Better still, we want to be the recipient of biblical love. We cannot control what others do, as this is not within our power. What is within our power is to give that kind of love.

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by Allen Webster