

Marriage: a Pattern of God's Love



The Love of God (Part 9)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue with our theme that so wonderfully expresses the true spirit of Christmas: The Love of God.

In my talk yesterday I explained one of the most important facts about God's love: it cannot be earned. We saw the story of the Pharisee who entertained Jesus, and while Jesus was there having dinner with him this sinful woman came in, shed her tears over His feet, dried His feet with her hair, and then anointed it with this very costly perfume. And the Pharisee protested and was angry, but Jesus explained this woman had nothing except that she needed Me. And so she received.

And I pointed out this is the big problem with so many people. They exclude themselves from the love of God because they think they have to do something to earn it and they, therefore, do not receive it freely as it is offered.

Today I'll be sharing with you one of the most vivid and beautiful patterns of God's love that we find in human experience: the Marriage Relationship. As a matter of fact, I just touch on that incidently in my talk yesterday when I spoke about that beautiful marriage poem or love poem, The Song of Solomon. You see, human love is a wonderful thing. The love of a husband for his wife is a beautiful thing. But beyond that its a picture of an even deeper and greater love, the love of God; the love of Christ.

Paul brings this out in Ephesians chapter 5 verses 25 through 32. Speaking to husbands he admonishes them of their responsibility to love their wives, but then he goes on to use the love of a husband for his wife as a picture of Christ's love for His people, the Church. This is what Paul says in Ephesians 5:25-32:

> "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to

> love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church, for we are members of His body. [And then Paul quotes something from Genesis chapter 2,] 'for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church." (NIV)

You see, human marriage is a profound mystery but it is also a picture of a yet more profound and wonderful mystery, the love of Christ for His Church. So Paul, in speaking to husbands and admonishing them that they have this divine responsibility to love their wives, takes that and uses it as a picture of the love of Christ for the Church.

And so I want to take just a few moments to point out certain aspects of the kind of love that Paul is here talking about, exemplified in the love of a husband for a wife, but typifying the love of Christ for His Church. Let me point out to you five facts that this passage, this example of Paul's, reveals to us about the love of Christ.

First of all, it reveals Christ's motivation. The beginning is, "...love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her." What was the basic motivation? Love. I've explained already that love cannot be explained. That you can't go beyond love and find out the reason for love. That love itself is the ultimate. It's the very nature of God. God is love. So Christ loved and out of His love He did what He did. So the first point there is that the motivation for what God does, for what Christ does, is love. Second, it's a self-giving love. That is what I said last week about agape love, it's self-giving. It doesn't just give presents, it gives itself. Christ loved the Church and He gave Himself up for her.

Third, love has a vision of what it can do for the person it loves. I think that this is beautiful. Jesus looked down on a world of sinners and He saw there, by faith, a beautiful bride for Himself. He gave Himself up because out of His love came a vision of what He could change people into. He gave Himself up to make His Church holy, that He might present her to Himself as a radiant Church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. You see, love has vision. Love sees the object of its love and it sees the potential. It sees beneath the surface. It sees what is not manifest to human senses or to the reason. And on the basis of this vision that comes out of faith proceeding from love, love acts in a way that would seem ridiculous to the carnal mind or to the person who basis everything on reason. How could God look down on a world of lost sinners and picture for Himself this beautiful bride? Only love understands that.

And then the fourth point about this kind of love, it makes full provision for all needs. If you study that passage I've read in Ephesian 5, Jesus makes full provision for all the needs of the Church, physical and spiritual. He cares for the Church just like a man cares for his own body, he feeds it; cares for it. But He also makes spiritual provision for the cleansing of the Church with the washing of water through the Word. So this kind of love makes total provision for the object of its love.

And finally, and perhaps most important of all, in the sense the ultimate purpose of this love is union. And Paul illustrates this by the words that were spoken in chapter Genesis 2 about the first marriage, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery and believe me it's a mystery in the natural, but how much greater the mystery that Christ's love envisages union with those He loves. That is the final purpose of this self- giving love of Christ. That is the reason why He makes all provision because He is going to be united forever with those whom He loves.

Now I want to turn back to the Old Testament for a moment for another passage which speaks about a marriage relationship and uses it as a picture of the love of God. This is from the prophet Hosea and it speaks about God's ultimate purpose in His dealings with His people Israel. It pictures first of all Israel's backsliding and unfaithfulness, and then God declares how He intends to win Israel back to Himself with His love. And I'm going to read just some verses from Hosea chapter 2, first of all verses 14 through 16, then verses 19 through 20. God says of Israel:

> "'Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. In that day,' declares the Lord, 'you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.' [And then a little further on the Lord says...] I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge [or you will know] the Lord.'" (NIV)

A little earlier the Lord said, "I will speak tenderly to her." The literal wording is "I will speak to her heart". I just want to take some principles out of that, that illustrates God's love and the

way He deals.

First of all, God allures us through His love; He draws us. He has a plan and He doesn't always tell us in advance what His plan is. And He may permit us to come into circumstances that seem very hard and very difficult, but it's all part of God's plan. He makes the Valley of Achor, which is trouble, a door of hope. So God allures; He entices us into a situation where we are going to have to turn to Him because everthing else has been cut off. And just as we see ourselves without any hope, God opens that door of hope and reveals Himself.

And then God desires direct communion. He wants to speak to our hearts, not just to our understanding. He doesn't want just to reason with us, He wants to commune with us.

And then again, as I said in the passage from Ephesians 5, the ultimate purpose of God is marriage union. He says, "You are going to call me 'my husband'; no longer just 'my master.'" That was the Old Testament word for a husband under the law, but the Lord says I want to introduce you to a new word. It's too difficult for me to explain in detail the exact significance of the Hebrew words used, but the Lords says I want this marriage relationship with you, I want to be your husband, I want you as my wife. So the same beautiful picture is there in Hosea prophetically that is brought out into the open in the New Testament by the teaching of the apostle Paul. Marriage is ultimately in it's profoundist meaning a picture of the love that God has for His people.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this same time. Tomorrow I'll be sharing on The Healing Power of God's Love.

Radio Program

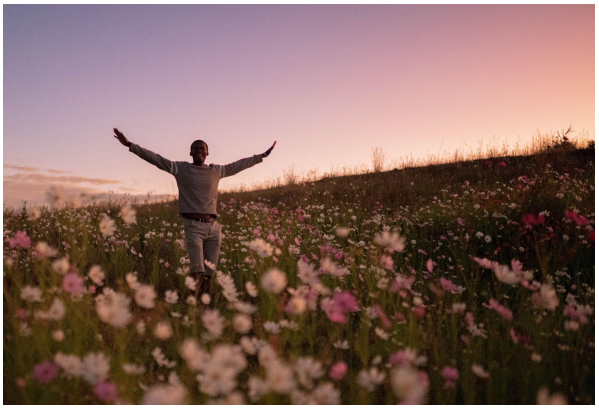
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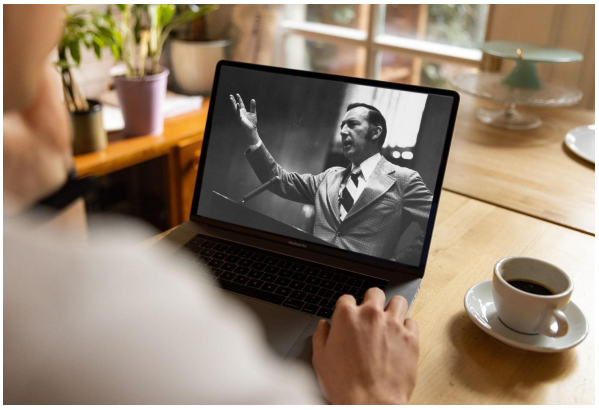
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