

# DISCIPLINE FOR GODLINESS

## DISCIPLINE OF MARRIAGE

### SACRIFICIAL LOVE

The opening charge in [Ephesians 5](#) is a clear call to radical, sacrificial love: “**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her**” ([v. 25](#)). This call to marital love was a bare-knuckled swing at the domestic commitment (or lack of same) of the men of the day — just as it is today. Taken seriously, the naked form of these words, “**love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,**” is staggering! And honestly received, the punch it delivers flattens many Christian men ... because they fall so short!

#### *Death*

The reason the punch hurts is because it is a naked call to *love with a willingness to sacrifice, even unto death*. Recognizing this, **Mike Mason**, author of the classic *The Mystery of Marriage*, says pointedly that marital love is like death — it wants all of us. I agree. If you do not understand this, you do not know what marital love is. It claims everything. **Mason** goes on by likening marital love to a shark: “And who has not been frightened almost to death by love’s dark shadow gliding swift and huge as an interstellar shark, like a swimming mountain, through the deepest waters of our being, through depths we never knew we had?”

The realization of what this call means may at first be frightening, but it is also beautiful, because a man who embraces such a love will experience the grace of death to self. Marriage is a call to die, and a man who does not die for his wife does not come close to the love to which he is called. Christian marriage vows are the inception of a lifelong practice of death, of *giving over not only all you have, but all you are*.

Is this a grim gallows call? Not at all! It is no more grim than dying to self and following Christ. In fact, those who lovingly die for their wives are those who know the most joy, have the most fulfilling marriages, and experience the most love. Christ’s call to Christian husbands is not a call to be doormats, but to die. As we shall see, this can mean a death to our rights, our time, our perceived pleasures — all liberating deaths. This is a truly male thing, a masculine thing — for it takes a strong man to die.

## *Suffering*

When Christ “**gave himself up**” for us, He not only died, He suffered. And His suffering was not only the cross, but it was and is suffering which comes from identification with His bride, the Church. This is why Saul, who was fanatically persecuting the Church, suddenly heard Jesus cry, “**Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?**” ([Acts 9:4](#)). Christ suffers with His bride, and husbands ought to suffer with and for theirs.

Men, when you properly hitch your life to another, you are in for a wild ride with huge ups and downs. Just as when you really love God you will undergo difficulties foreign to an unloving heart, so it is in marriage. You will share her experienced injustices, cruelties, and disappointments. You will experience her upsets, insecurities, and despairs. But, of course, you will also know an index of joys beyond the range of the unloving. You will ride through some dark valleys, but you will also soar among the stars!

## *Intercession*

On the evening Christ gave Himself up for us, [John 17](#) tells us, He prayed in succession for Himself, for His twelve disciples, and for all of us who would later believe. When He finished praying for His future bride, He went to the cross. Then came **His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His enthronement** at the right hand of the Father, where He constantly makes *intercession* for us.

Thus we understand that giving ourselves for our brides involves prayerful intercession. Men, do you pray for your wives with something more than, “Bless good old Margaret in all she does”? If not, you are sinning against her and against God. Most Christian men who claim to love their wives never offer more than a perfunctory nod to their wives’ needs before God. Men, you ought to have a list of her needs, spoken and unspoken, which you passionately hold up to God out of love for her. **Praying is the marital work of a Christian husband!**

The bare-knuckle command is, “**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.**” Men, we are divinely called to *die* for our brides, to take on her *sufferings* as our own, and to make *intercession* for her.