

DISCIPLINE FOR GODLINESS

DISCIPLINE OF MARRIAGE

SELF-LOVE

Greek mythology tells of a beautiful youth who loved no one until the day he saw his own reflection in the water and fell in love with that reflection. He was so lovesick; he finally wasted away and died, and was turned into a flower that bears his name — Narcissus. Actually, narcissistic self-love is not a pretty thing! We are repulsed by narcissism and carefully seek to avoid it.

But, incredibly, in [Ephesians 5](#) we are called to a sublime self-love: **“In this 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” (vv. 28–30)**. This loving ourselves by loving our wives is based on the **“one flesh”** unity we have already talked about — the deep exchange of our souls in marriage which can even make us look alike. It is the love that **Shakespeare’s Lorenzo** celebrates when he says to **Jessica** she will be placed in “my constant soul.” Our marital love is our constant soul!

To love our wives as our own bodies is a grand and great thing. It means granting her the same importance, the same value, **“the same existential gravity that we take for granted in us.”** She becomes as real as we are to ourselves. She is me.

How do we love our wives as our own bodies? How do we care for her as we do for ourselves? **The answer involves three incarnations.**

The first is a physical incarnation. **Dr. Richard Selzer**, in his book **Mortal Lessons: Notes in the Art of Surgery**, tells of performing surgery to remove a tumor and of necessity severing a facial nerve, leaving a young woman’s mouth permanently twisted in palsy. In **Dr. Selzer’s** own words:

“Her young husband is in the room. He stands on the opposite side of the bed, and together they seem to do well in the evening lamplight, isolated from me, private. Who are they, I ask myself, he and this wry-mouth I have made, who gaze at and touch each other so generously, greedily? The young woman speaks. “Will my mouth always be like this?” she asks. “Yes,” I say, “it will. It is because the nerve was cut.” She nods and is silent. But the young man smiles. “I like it,” he says. “It is kind of cute.” ... Unmindful, he bends to kiss her crooked mouth, and I, so close, can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate to hers, to show her that their kiss still works.”

Bible Study: Discipline for Godliness

Discipleship Series:

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

This is the way we must love. Her body is our body, her comfort our comfort, her adornment our adornment, her care our care.

A second way to love our wives as our own bodies is emotional incarnation. So many men make the emotional differences between men and women subject to degrading humor. They belittle the female disposition, as if male stoicism were superior. They realize the differences, but make no allowances for them and do not attempt to understand. No man can claim obedience to God and do this! It is a flat-sided masculinity which imagines that understanding another is a feminine trait. Actually such understanding of the complementary natures God gave man and woman is the mark of a fully developed, mature man.

Then, of course, there must be social incarnation. Erma Bombeck humorously suggests that some “**Archie Bunkers**” think their wives spend their day lugging power tools out to the sandbox for their kids to play with, or discarding one sock for every pair in the drawer.

Of course, women have many social settings: the home, the office, the classroom. Listen to this testimony from a pastor friend of mine who shall remain anonymous: “But I remember a profitable incarnation I experienced when my wife visited her sister in Connecticut for a week, leaving me in charge of our four small children. I fixed the meals, changed thousands and thousands of diapers, fixed hurts, settled quarrels, gave baths, cleaned up catastrophes, and cleaned them up again. I was at work before I got up and after I went to bed. The experience so marked me that in my mind I invented a new kitchen, modeled after a car wash. The floors slope to a large drain in the middle of the room. A hose hangs on the wall, nozzle ready to spray things down after the meal. It was an incarnation I was not anxious to repeat again, but as my wife says, “It was good for you!”

Men, we are called to a divinely appointed self-love: to love our wives as our own bodies, to care for them as Christ does the Church. **Loving our wives’ bodies as our own demands a triple incarnation: physical, emotional, and social. We are to devote the same energy, time, and creativity to our wives as to ourselves.** We are to cherish our constant souls. Envy the woman who is loved like this. Even more, envy the man who loves like this — for he is like Christ.

Men, what a challenge [Ephesians 5](#) presents us — sacrificial love (love is like death!), sanctifying love (love that elevates), and self-love (loving your wife as much as you love your own body). If this calls for anything, it calls for some holy sweat. As **Walter Trobisch** said, “Marriage is not an achievement which is finished. It is a dynamic process between two people, a relation which is constantly being changed, which grows or dies.”

Men, the all-encompassing call to love our wives as Christ loved the Church demands specific disciplines.