

## You Are Loved

### Intro:

Love. It's the focus of countless cheesy songs and chick flicks. We have an annual holiday dedicated to "love"--Valentine's Day. Can anyone guess which love song is rated the greatest love song of all times? According to Billboard magazine, that honor goes to "Endless Love" by Diana Ross & Lionel Richie. In 1981, "Endless Love" was #1 on the charts for 9 straight weeks.

What about movies? Which movie do you think was rated as the greatest love story of all time? According to the American Film Institute's list "AFI's 100 Years... 100 Passions" list, it is "Casablanca." Interesting side note--the newest movie to make the top 20 was 1990's "Ghost" and the newest movie in the entire list of 100 movies was #100 "Jerry Maguire"! Of course, this list is 11 years old, but I can't think of any movie made in the last 11 years that would rival the movies on this list!

"Love" is a strange word. We use it all the time, don't we? I *love* a good ribeye cooked medium rare, but I also *love* my wife. I *love* my truck, but I also *love* my kids. How can we use the same word? We even use it sarcastically-- "Don't you just *love* it when that happens?" It's no wonder there is so much confusion about what *love* is in our culture today. We only have 1 word for *love* in the English language! Listen to this quote:

*"Sanskrit (ancient language of India) has 96 words for love; ancient Persian has 80, Greek three, and English only one. This is indicative of the poverty of awareness or emphasis that we give to that tremendously important realm of feeling. Eskimos have 30 words for snow, because it is a life-and-death matter to them to have exact information about the element they live with so intimately. If we had a vocabulary of 30 words for love ... we would immediately be richer and more intelligent in this human element so close to our heart. An Eskimo probably would die of clumsiness if he had only one word for snow; we are close to dying of loneliness because we have only one word for love. Of all the Western languages, English may be the most lacking when it comes to feeling." - Robert Johnson, "The Fisher King and the Handless Maiden"*

We are in the 7th week of our series "Know Who You Are." It's a series designed to help us understand our identity as followers of Jesus. To sum up what we've learned so far, we've seen that we are the highest of God's creation and His image bearers. As such, we have incredible value and deserve His love. In fact, God went to great expense to restore His prized creation in sending His Son to die in our place so that we could be remade. Last week, we saw that if this has all taken place, we are "refulgent." Don't you love it when a pastor has to use some obscure word just to keep the alliteration going in his message titles? "Refulgent" means light, so as God's image bearers and children of light, we are to be light to a darkened world. Today we're going to take a closer look at God's love--the extent that God went to to demonstrate His love for us.

So, if you have your Bibles, turn with me to Ephesians 5:21-33. If you don't have a Bible...

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### Read Ephesians 5:21-33

You've probably heard teachings from this passage at weddings or in marriage seminars, and that's certainly very appropriate as it is one of the key passages in all of Scripture that deals directly with marriage. However, this is not going to be a message focused entirely on marriage. We will definitely talk about marriage this morning, but that won't be our primary focus.

So, if we only have one word for *love* in the English language, how do we know what it means when the Bible says, "Husbands, *love* your wives, just as Christ *loved* the Church..."? Well, the New Testament was written in Greek and there are 4 words for *love* in the Greek language:

**phileo** - affectionate regard or friendship, brotherly love (25 times)

**storge** - familial love, natural affection--such as the love of a parent towards offspring and vice versa

**eros** - intimate or romantic love, often a sexual love

**agape** - self-sacrificing love, an act of the will (262 times)

### Only 2 of them are used in the New Testament: phileo (25x) & agape (262x)

Which Greek word for *love* do you think would best describe our culture in verse 25? Definitely "eros"! As soon as the tingles begin to fade, we "fall out of love." The Greek word for love that appears exclusively in this passage is *agape*. In fact, it is the predominant word for love used throughout the New Testament.

Today, we are going to see that **God loves us with a self-sacrificing love**. How was God's love self-sacrificing? We're going to look at 4 ways God demonstrated self-sacrificing love. In verse 25 of our text, it says that **Christ gave Himself up**. Because we are created in God's image--literally image bearers of our creator God--He considered us valuable enough to warrant sending His own Son to rescue us from our own filth. God *gave* His Son--John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Even people who don't go to church can quote John 3:16!

Second, **Christ laid His life down**.

John 10:17-18 says, "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."

In 1984, the British-American band Foreigner had it's biggest #1 hit ever. Anyone know what it was? It was their song "I Want to Know What Love Is." Well, 1 John 3:16 says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."

If you want to know what *love* is, just look at what Jesus did. God could have let us rot in our filth--in the mess we had made because of our rebellion, but He didn't. Instead,

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the One who spoke the incredibly vast universe with all of its amazing galaxies, supernovas, stars, suns and planets, laid His life down for you and for me. Third, in doing this, **Christ made Himself nothing**. Look at Philippians 2:6-8.

### Read Philippians 2:6-8

God wrapped Himself in flesh, allowed Himself to be born in a smelly barn and then let His own creation beat Him to a pulp and humiliate Him by crucifying Him. God made Himself nothing.

Now, maybe you can imagine God doing that for you. After all, you're a pretty good person. You drive the speed limit (most of the time), you've never killed anyone and you make it a general habit to not steal (at least not valuable things). But, try imagining God doing all that for someone else a little less "good." What about Adolf Hitler or Osama bin Laden? What about Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy or Charles Manson? Or more recent criminals like Ariel Castro the Cleveland man who kidnapped 3 young girls and held them hostage in his home for 9 to 11 years? What about the 215 registered sex offenders who currently reside in Livingston County? Can you believe that Jesus Christ gave Himself up for them--that He laid His life down for them? He did.

James 2:10 says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." Yes, that means that the little white lie you told yesterday condemns you just as much as a mass murderer. The Bible says that we were spiritually dead in our sin and completely powerless to do anything about it. And while we were in this powerless state is when God intervened.

### Read Romans 5:6-8

He enacted His plan "...at just the right time, when we were still powerless..." fourth, **Christ died for sinners**. All sinners. The "big sinners" and the "little sinners" because, as we saw earlier in James, we are all "big sinners."

So, what does this mean? Let me sum it up. You are loved by God. Even though you may feel unlovable, you are God's image bearer, so He reveres you. And He demonstrated His love by giving up His life so that you could be brought back to life spiritually--so that you could experience the life that God intended for you to live. And that is a life filled with purpose, fulfillment and adventure NOW and when you die or when Jesus returns to earth, a life enjoying God's presence forever.

Now, you're probably saying, "I thought this was a marriage passage." I'm getting there! Ephesians 5:21-33 is the longest statement in the New Testament on the relationship of husbands and wives. This book was written to people who lived in the first century of Greco-Roman culture. This was a culture that, unlike our culture today, was self-centered and unbelievably immoral and sexual. Our culture today isn't self-centered or immoral! It's enlightened, progressive, tolerant. Don't kid yourself! Do you think we have arrived at some new level of self-actualization that sets us above any previous civilization? Our country is going quickly down the same path as previously great

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civilizations that are no longer great because they “self-actualized” themselves out of existence. When you have no moral compass or absolutes, the thing just crashes and burns. Guess what? The wheels are coming off and we are careening quickly in the same direction as the Greeks, the Romans and every once great civilization.

There’s a huge debate raging in our country over redefining marriage. It’s extremely controversial and complicated! I’m not going to get into all the nuances of the debate, but I want to share **2 truths about marriage from Ephesians 5**. First: **God created and defined marriage**. Ephesians 5:31 is a direct quote from Genesis 2 where God created and defined marriage. So let’s look at the origination of marriage in Genesis 2:20-24.

### Read Genesis 2:20b-24

God created and defined marriage as 1 man and 1 woman becoming 1. His plan was that the identities of a man and a woman become intertwined so much that they experience oneness. Marriage as created and defined by God is a truly amazing thing!

Second: **God created marriage to be the ultimate picture of the gospel**. Keep your finger in Genesis 2, but let’s look back at Ephesians 5.

### Read Ephesians 5:31-32

Right after Paul quotes Genesis 2 “...the two will become one flesh,” Paul says, “This is a profound mystery--but guess what? I’m talking about Christ and the church!” God’s design was to have marriage reflect how Christ loves His people. How was this a mystery? It was a mystery until Christ established the New Covenant and demonstrated His love by going to the cross so that we could become one with Him through a covenant relationship. You remember covenant, right? We’ve talked about it quite often. In a covenant relationship, two become one. No longer does one live for his own interests. He lives for the interest of his covenant partner. If \_\_\_\_\_ and I are in a covenant relationship, \_\_\_\_\_’s enemies are now my enemies and my enemies are his. If either one of us gets attacked by our enemy, the other one must come to help. Our identity is now blended. David and Jonathan had a covenant and they exchanged clothing to symbolize that their identities were now intertwined. People might have actually mistook Jonathan for David and vice versa.

Did you notice all the references to “body”? v. 23: Christ is the head of the church, his BODY; v. 28: husbands love your wives as their own BODIES; v. 29 never hated there own bodies; v. 30 we are members of his BODY. The NIV stops at BODY in verse 30, but the KJV continues “...of his flesh and of his bones” which is reflected in the Greek. Go back to Genesis 2:23 for a second.

### Read Genesis 2:23

Do you see it? We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. Adam said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh...” Marriage is a picture of the

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gospel because it is a covenant relationship: two become one. As such, it is the ultimate picture of the gospel.

If marriage were to be redefined in our culture, could a marriage between two men or two women be a picture of the gospel? If husbands are pictures of Christ in the marriage and wives are pictures of the church, same-sex marriage is no longer a picture of the gospel. And whether you like it or not, your marriage gives a picture of the gospel to a watching world. What kind of picture is your marriage giving?

Husbands, we are to love our wives as Christ loves the church. As such, you give a picture of Christ to the world by how you love your wife. When you are harsh with your wife, you show the world that Christ is harsh and unmerciful to His people. When you are self-absorbed and indifferent to the needs of your wife, you show the world that Christ is indifferent to His people. When you are too busy to talk to and spend time with your wife, you show the world that Christ is too busy to be concerned with spending time with His people. If you leave your wife, you show the world that Christ leaves His people.

Wives, you give a picture of the God's people to the world. When you belittle or disrespect your husband, you show the world that His people do not honor Christ. When you refuse to follow his leadership, you show the world that His people do not follow Christ's lead. If you are unfaithful to your husband, you show the world that Christ is not satisfying.

If this is the kind of picture of the gospel the world is getting from Christian marriages, is it any wonder that people don't find the gospel attractive? This is why I believe that God's ultimate will is that Christians never divorce for ANY reason. Hear me when I say this: If you and your spouse are a followers of Christ and you are having difficulty in your marriage, if you ask Him, He will heal your marriage! How do I know this? Two reason: 1) Because God created it to be a picture of the gospel and He doesn't want that picture distorted, and 2) I've seen Him do it! Suzanne and I have counseled a number of couples dealing with anything from communication issues to full blown infidelity and anything in between. We always start with the gospel! If we can just get at least one of them to believe that God can and wants to heal their marriage and to begin begging God to do just that, He has always brought healing--every time! Because of God's intervention and by His power and not by anything Suzanne or I have said, not one couple that we have counseled has divorced. And there were some that already had the divorce papers drawn up!

I say this not to beat you up if you've been divorced, but to encourage those who are experiencing marriage difficulties! If you have gone through the heartbreak of divorce, there is hope, healing and forgiveness!

One more thing on marriage before I move on. You might be saying, "Kevin, are you going to saying anything about the "s-word"--SUBMIT? I'll just say two things: 1) first, verse 21 says we are to submit to one another, and 2) yes, it does specifically say, 'wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands...' but let me ask you this: If your

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husband loved you as Christ loved the church--the way we discussed earlier. If he gave himself up for you--his desires, hopes, dreams, rights; if you knew that He would literally die to save your life; if he led your family in humility as Christ humbled Himself; if he showed you love even when you were unlovable; would you have any trouble whatsoever submitting to him?

This passage specifically gives us "Instructions for Christian Households." That's the title my Bible places above verses 21-33. But we see from other passages that **we are to love others with a self-sacrificing love** not just husbands and wives. Let's look back at Philippians 2. This time we'll start at the beginning of the chapter.

### Read Philippians 2:1-5

Turn over to 1 John again.

### Read 1 John 4:7-21

It is clear from these passages that God loves us with a self-sacrificing love and that we in turn are to love others with a self-sacrificing love. Philippians 2 says we are to value others above ourselves. In other words, **we are to give ourselves up**. We are to give up our rights, our agendas, our desires. We surrender them to God and we surrender them to others. **We are to lay our lives down**. We are to surrender our lives to God and in doing so we will live our lives not to pursue earthly things, but to advance God's Kingdom, pushing back the darkness and bringing hope and healing to broken lives. **We are to make ourselves nothing**. Just as Christ humbled Himself, 1 Peter 5:6 says we are to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God so that He may lift us up at the right time. And **we are to love unconditionally**. God loved us while we were still sinners so to love like God loves means that we are to love others when they are unlovable. This is graduate level Christianity stuff! This is hard to do! It's easy to be a Christian who comes to church once a week, throws a little cash in the offering box and tries to avoid the "big" sins. But it's hard to love others the way God loves us!

### Reflection

As we go to reflection today, we will be celebrating communion. It's really perfect because communion is a covenant meal. Often, when two parties would make a covenant, they would share a covenant meal together. When He established the New Covenant, Jesus was eating the Passover meal with His disciples.

### Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

As you go to partake of the communion elements this morning, I want you to reflect on these questions:

- 1) **How have you responded to the self-sacrificing love of God?** God demonstrated His love for you by sending Jesus to pay the penalty of your sin. Have you responded to His demonstration of love? If you're not sure what I'm talking about, we'd love to

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take some time to show you what an appropriate response to God's outpouring of love looks like.

**2) If you're married, is your marriage showing an accurate picture of the Gospel?**

Or are you portraying a distorted view of God or His people? Maybe you're experiencing difficulty in your marriage. We would love to come alongside you and help you experience God work a miracle in your marriage!

**3) Do you love others with the self-sacrificing love of God?** We don't have the ability to love others like God loves us unless we are one of His children. If you are unable to love others unconditionally, it could be an indication that you haven't experienced God's love. 1 John 4:8 says, "Whoever does not love (agape) does not know God because God is love (agape)."

As you partake of the communion elements, thank God for demonstrating His love by allowing His body to be broken and His blood to be shed for you.