

Love, an Essential Glue

Six Essentials for Families

Ephesians 5:25-33; 1 Peter 4:8

August 17, 2003

Wesley J. Gabel

Today, we will look at what the Bible reveals to be the most important ingredient for a family. Everything else pales by comparison. Families can survive in some fractured form without everything else I've spoken about in this series, but no family can survive or ever hope to flourish without genuine, life-building love. In these few moments, we are going to consider the role and nature of genuine love that serves as an essential glue in relationships.

The Scripture lesson from Ephesians began in the middle of Paul's instructions for married couples. I did that purposely. Many men and women, scholars included, can't get beyond what is written in verses 21 through 24 about submission. They focus upon some kind of power dynamic, where someone's the boss of someone else rather than on a partnership dynamic of trust. Since they misunderstand biblical submission, they either reject the Scripture as outmoded and irrelevant, or they implement a hierarchy that never satisfies the needs of either partner. The arrangement then breeds resentment in partners that explodes into acts of frustration, selfishness and defiance. (The curse of Genesis 3:16 continues.)

What's so foolish about all of this is that I've never seen a committee of two elect officers. Have you? Well, actually I've seen it once... in my high school annual.

I graduated from a high school that listed all the honors and activities of each senior in the back of annual. When I wrote down everything I participated in or achieved, it looked paltry compared to some. The friend next to me agreed that his list could use some embellishment. We pondered how we could lengthen our lists and decided that since there were only 10 of us taking high school physics, we'd form a physics club. Its sole purpose was to stretch our credentials in the annual. I quickly nominated and elected myself Physics Club president. That left vice president to my friend who wasn't as quick. That's the only time I can ever recall a committee of two electing officers. Because our club did nothing and never even met, holding office created no problem... for awhile. We did inform the other 8 physics class members of their automatic membership. One physics club member was especially enthusiastic. He also was the master of ceremonies at a senior recognition assembly. After he recognized all the senior cheerleaders as honorary members of our physics club and me as president, the high school principal and physics teacher cornered me.

A marriage is not a do-nothing club; and if holding office in a do-nothing club put me in an awkward situation, what kind of problems might develop when you elect officers in a life-long partnership? Rather than focusing on who has the final "say" – which in a partnership should be consensus – one should ask, "How can I best love my partner?" We find that out in our passage from Ephesians.

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. (Eph 5:25-27, NIV)

In Ephesians we are not given a standard of love; we are given a model of love. Standards tell us how we are doing. Models show us what to do. We people really don't need to be told as much we need to be showed what love is. In fact, there is a basic principle of life that

Dr. John Maxwell helped me see several years ago: “*We teach what we know, but we reproduce what we are.*” Parents can talk to their children. They can say “no” to drugs, alcohol, smoking and swearing and “yes” to honesty, respect and self-control, but no matter how well they speak, their own behavior in all those matters is far more influential in shaping their children’s habits and attitudes than their words. Similarly, one does not know how to love by taking a class or hearing a lecture. Love is tasted. Love is experienced. Only then can love be shared. The Bible teaches, “*We love because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19, NIV).

In Ephesians believing husbands are directed to love their wives as Christ loved them and the church. That’s the model. How did Christ love the church?

First, he “*gave himself up for her to make her holy.*” Christ loved us as the church in that he made the welfare of you and me his first priority. He made our welfare and need more important than his welfare and need. That’s love. Love’s not a feeling. Love’s not a state that you fall into and out of. Love’s a decision. Love’s a commitment. Love is the action of working for another person’s welfare ahead of your own. You don’t just fit their needs in while you pursue your own ambition. Their good becomes your agenda, your pursuit. Christ gave himself up for our good.

Understand that Christ is not our doormat or “sugar daddy.” He doesn’t live to fulfill our lust. He doesn’t aim at our immediate gratification. That’s not love. Christ aims at supplying our real need. He focuses on helping us fulfill our God-created potential and purpose, to make us “holy.” That’s love. That’s also sacrifice. Consistent with that, I’ve never found a neglected person who felt loved. The most frequent complaint I hear from married women is that their husbands love their jobs, hobbies, sports or whatever more than them. They feel neglected and won’t feel loved until there is sacrifice, some real giving up on the part of their husbands.

Second, Christ loved the church through “*cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.*” I can just hear someone ask, “What on earth does that mean?”

Do you remember Jesus’ lesson to the Jewish leaders on what’s clean and unclean? The Pharisees were all over Jesus because his followers didn’t do all the ritual washing that was prescribed in the Jewish religion at that time. Jesus said that it wasn’t what is on the outside of a cup that makes it dirty, but what is on the inside of a cup makes the water unusable. Moreover, he told them that it isn’t what a person eats that makes them unclean but what is in their heart. In other words, it’s attitudes that make us impure and eventually destroy us. Washing with water is the act of removing impurities. Jesus cleanses us of destructive attitudes by washing us with his word, his truth. We hate ourselves; he calls us precious. We loathe our lives; he calls us God’s children. We think we are misfits and helpless sinners; he calls us holy. Moreover, he says that nothing is impossible for the person who believes. Jesus’ word encourages us. It challenges us. It stretches us. It coaches us. It cleanses us like water washing the dirt away, so that now who we are can really be seen and appreciated.

Love comes in both word and deed. True love builds people. It calls forth the best in people. It encourages and challenges and always, always stretches them. It does so because love believes the best. Paul wrote, “*(Love) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*” (1 Corinthians 13:8). Indeed, love covers over a multitude of sins. It’s willing to accept a person where he or she is at, and then work to bless and strengthen him or her.

Some years ago, I learned the concept of *love language*. Everyone has their own language. There are certain things that really communicate love. They are not the same for everyone. For one man, it may be the wife attending a ball game. For some woman, it may be the husband pitching in, folding clothes and carrying laundry baskets. Everyone has their own

love language, and because of that I became sensitive to the language of Ephesians in verse 33 where the man is commanded to love the wife and the woman to respect her husband.

I really think that the biblical language is important. As early as 2nd grade I remember a pecking order in school where boys tried to achieve respect with athletic prowess or academic achievement. There was competition, there was exhibition and there was desire for respect. In Paul's earlier instructions for women, he tells them to submit because even as Christ is head of the church so the husband is the head of the wife. The term "head" did not speak of authority. There was no such concept connected with the term *head* among the Greeks. Instead, *head* spoke of source. The head of a river was the source of its flow. The head of a body was the source of its action. In the same manner Christ was the head of the church, the source of our life; and husbands were the head of their wives, the source of their provision and protection. When wives in that day battled with their husbands, they harmed the source of their livelihood. When they honored and encouraged their husbands, they spoke in their husbands' love language. They ministered to the gnawing ache in their husbands and helped them become greater people and better providers.

The Apostle Paul once wrote that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. How have you been built up with love? Are you ready to invest your life in an imperfect, fallen child of God? Are you ready to give yourself up for another's good? Are you willing to learn the love language of another? Love is the commitment and action that works as an essential glue, a glue that binds families together, a glue that strengthens and builds healthy people and creates an eternal bond.