

The Christian Woman - Outline for Period 12

Marriage/Wifehood

Part One: - The Marriage Commitment - Kristine Reeves

The following information comes from the SHBI course entitled *The Christian Family*.

- I. According to scripture two elements seem to form a marriage before God: A covenant of mutual commitment and a physical, sexual union sanctified by that covenant. Matthew 19:3-9 reads:

Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for any reason? Haven't you read the scriptures? Jesus replied. They record that from the beginning God made them male and female. And he said, This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together. Then why did Moses say a man could merely write an official letter of divorce and send her away? they asked. Jesus replied, Moses permitted divorce as a concession to your hard-hearted wickedness, but it was not what God had originally intended. And I tell you this, a man who divorced his wife and marries another commits adultery unless his wife has been unfaithful.

- II. Divorce was easy in Jesus' time - Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (from the Law of Moses).

If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

- III Jesus' standard is different - Matthew 1:3-9.

- A. Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of heart among his people - Matthew 19:8.
- B. For his Kingdom standard, Christ returns to the original will of the Creator concerning marriage - Matthew 19:4-6.
- C. In marriage, a person's primary commitment shifts from his family of origin to his mate - Matthew 19:5.
- D. Marriage is a covenant in which a man and woman consciously bind themselves to forsake all others and to keep themselves for each other alone. God himself joins them, and he who would divorce them acts against God - Matthew 19:5-6.

- E. If either partner breaks the covenant by having a sexual relationship with a third party, this is called adultery - Matthew 19:9, compare Romans 7:1-3.
- F. Christ applies this teaching equally to man or woman. Mark 10:11-12.
- G. Even if a married person divorces his mate and marries the third party, the new relationship is still called adultery by God - Matthew 19:9. In other words, what man calls marriage is called adultery by God if a partner in the marriage has an obligation to a previous marriage covenant - Matthew 19:9.
- H. A person is freed from his obligation to a marriage covenant only if his mate is unfaithful to the covenant by committing sexual immorality - Matthew 19:9.

IV. Even before Christ came, God began to tell his Old Testament people how he really felt about divorce - Malachi 2:13-16.

Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, why? It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in the spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. I hate divorce, Says the God of Israel, and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment, says the Lord Almighty. So guard yourself in the spirit and do not break faith.

- A. God refused the prayers of the Jews because they had divorced the wives of their youth and married younger wives - Malachi 2:13-14.
- B. God is present as a witness when a marriage covenant is made, and holds the partner responsible for keeping the covenant - Malachi 2:14; compare Proverbs 2:16,17.
- C. God so strictly protects marriage and judges marital unfaithfulness because he is "seeking Godly offspring" - Malachi 2:15. Divorce wounds marriage partners and deprives children of stable, secure, Godly upbringing.
- D. God hates divorce and considers it a form of violence and a breaking of faith - Malachi 2:14-16.

V. The apostle Paul also taught about marriage and divorce - 1 Corinthians 7:10-16.

- A. The Greek word for "separate" (or "leave" or "depart") in 7:10 includes divorce.
- B. God does not want husband and wife to separate- 7:10; compare Matthew 19:6; Malachi 2:16. But there will be some unbearable or dangerous situations where separation at least temporarily will be necessary 7:10, 11. In such cases the partners are not free from their covenant. They are still married in God's sight and must either remain single or be reconciled to each other.
- C. Where a Christian is married to an unbeliever, the Christian is to remain in the marriage

and be faithful to his or her partner if the unbeliever is willing. The Christian is not to seek divorce. But if the unbeliever chooses to divorce the believer, the believer is not bound to the marriage - 1 Corinthians 7:15.

- VI. A Wife's Responsibility To Oneness in the Marriage (the following material is from Family Life Marriage Conferences).
- A. Ephesians 5:15-16 - "Be very careful then how you live—not as unwise but as wise. Making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."
 - B. Galatians 3:28 - "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
 - C. 1 Corinthians 11:11 - "In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman."
 - D. A wise woman discerns God's divine order of responsibility in marriage. Ephesians 5:23.
 - E. Genesis 2:18 - "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'
- VII. Another responsibility of the wife is to Love Her Husband.
- A. Titus 2:4 encourages the older women to encourage the younger women to love their husbands.
 - B. Love is an attitude of unconditional acceptance. Whose love can we compare with this?
 1. Accept his as he is can imperfect person.
 2. Accept his thoughts and feelings.
 3. Accept him despite his failures.
 4. Love is a sacrificial action.
 5. Love is keeping your husband in focus as your top priority.
 6. Love is staying available to your husband in terms of time and energy.
 7. Love is listening.
 8. Love is physical responsiveness. Song of Solomon 7:10-12.

VIII. Marriages can be healed. See *Restoring Troubled Marriages* - a handout from The Christian Family.

A. One partner can often turn a marriage around.

1. Start with yourself.

2. Sincere unilateral effort by one partner will soften the other and encourage him to try.

3. Surface grievances are only symptoms of deeper root problems.

4. What makes a person beautiful is more inward than outward.

B. What do you think the times of greatest danger to a marriage are?

C. Major issues in marital conflict include: in-laws, communication, finances, work, children, remarriage adjustments, self-concept, violence, unfaithfulness, time, sex, religion, and over-commitment.

What can be done about marriage problems:

Part Two: Submission – Ruth Shelburne

I. Proverbs 31:10-12

A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.

II. God's standards are not the same as the world's for Christian submission in marriage.

A. Ephesians 5:21 - "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

B. Ephesians 5:22-24

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

C. Titus 2:4, 5

Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

D. Ephesians 5:33

However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

The Amplified Bible says:

...and let the wife see that she respects and reverences her husband - that she notices him, regards him, honors him, prefers him, venerates and esteems him; and that she defers to him, praises him, and loves and admires him exceedingly.

E. 1 Corinthians 11:3 - "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."

F. Colossians 3:18 - "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."

III. Submission is a problem for most women. No woman is submissive by nature. Submission is always a decision of her will. The world looks at submission from the fleshly nature; but submission is transformed when we look at it in the spirit of Christ. Christ is equally divine with the Father yet He submits totally to Him. This does not reduce Christ's value or standing at all.

IV. Christian life-style for men as well as women is submission.

A. Ephesians 5:21 - "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." God's desire for us - married or single, young or old - is to honor, serve and subject ourselves to one another. We reflect Christ's character as we move away from selfishness and defer to others. A heart willing to submit, dedicated to honoring and yielding to others, is to be the heart of God's people, His women, His church.

B. 1 Corinthians 11:3 - "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." Submission is a choice and a decision. In reality we are submitting to God in every instance - Romans 13:1, 2.

C. Ephesians 5:24 - "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands **in everything**" [emphasis mine - RS].

D. 1 Peter 3:1-7

...won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

- V. Fear may be the reason we find it so hard to submit to our husbands. Faith is the opposite of fear, and it is by faith that we obey God. Faith gives us the strength to submit when it is so contrary to our nature. Submission has everything to do with God.

- VI. Biblical submission does not make the wife a non-person. It demonstrates a strong character whose actions are voluntary with quiet respect.
 - A. Understanding
 - B. Appreciation
 - C. Encouragement
 - D. Admiration

- VII. Power in submission - example of Jesus

- VIII. A wife does not submit because:
 - A. Her husband is always right
 - B. Just when she thinks he is right
 - C. Her husband is a good husband (compare 1 Peter 2:18)

- IX. The Christian wife submits because:
 - A. God has given leadership to her husband
 - B. It is 'as to the Lord.'
 - C. It is as the church submits to Christ.

- X. Submission **does not** mean:

- A. To be inferior
 - B. To lose your identity
 - C. Blind obedience (see Acts 4:19, 20; 5:29)
 - D. You should feel used
 - E. Allowing your husband to violate the law or to be physically abusive
- XI. Submission **does** mean:
- A. A response to your husband with a view to God's design for marriage
 - B. To free your husband to lead by lining yourself up under his leadership. It is a gift of love you choose to give to your husband out of obedience to Christ.
 - C. To empower your husband to lead, by encouraging his initiative. Refuse to take the lead, give him a chance and pray for him.
 - D. To honor God's word. In Titus 2:5 women are taught "to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God."
- XII. Honor God. God blesses obedience. Our attitude toward our husbands often is a mirror of our attitudes toward God. Trust God and leave the consequences to Him.
- A. Forced submission results in migraines, stored-up resentment and damaged emotional and physical intimacy.
 - B. Choosing submission results in freedom from inner conflict, powerful and redemptive living after Jesus' example.
- XIII. Both husband and wife are submitted to Christ and to each other's needs. We join Jesus in laying down our rights and taking up the cross daily for the needs of others.

Another Look at Masculine Leadership

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. - Ephesians 5:25-29 NIV

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. - 1 Peter 3:7 NIV

The solution really begins with men, not with women. If man is the leader, that makes him most responsible for the welfare of the marriage. The buck stops with us men.

We think we like the leadership part (not fully understanding what it means). But we don't always like the responsibility that goes with it. If more men were willing to lead responsibly, and if they led in the sacrificial spirit of Christ, women would find it much easier to submit to men's leadership.

Marriage looks totally different when viewed in the spirit of Christ. The world sees the scriptural role of the wife as slavery and the scriptural role of husband as boss and dictator. "I'm glad I'm a man--I get to be boss in our family." "She had better respect me." "I expect her to take care of things at home and the kids--also to help me pay the bills."

In Christ marriage is not a power struggle between spouses but a redemptive partnership.

The roles are different but not unequal. In Christ each marriage partner willingly accepts the role Christ has given him or her in order to be redemptive. Each willingly submits to the requirements of that role, because it is for the Lord.

Submission in marriage is MUTUAL.

"*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*" - Ephesians 5:2 NIV. Peter describes how Jesus submitted to the cross to redeem us:

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. - 1 Peter 2:21-25 NIV

In the very next verses, Peter ties the submission of the wife and the submission of the husband to Christ's example of submission to the cross--

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the

word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives. - 1 Peter 3:1 NIV
(emphasis mine)

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. - 1 Peter 3:7 NIV (emphasis mine)

The husband's role (laying down his life for her) requires every bit as much submission as the wife's role does - see Ephesians 5:25.

**Your wife is very vulnerable and at risk when
she entrusts her life and well-being to your leadership.**

You need to be worthy of that trust, and not let her down.

**Real masculinity is in being strong enough to
"lay down your life" for your wife daily**

To give up self for her just as Christ did for the church. To consider her needs, not just your own. To protect her, run interference, bear the heavier burdens. *Physically*, you should die for her if necessary. But more usually you help her by providing for her needs and by sharing the physical stresses of life. *Emotionally* you help her by taking your rightful responsibilities, not pushing off on her what you should be dealing with. And by showing her that she is first in your heart. *Spiritually* you protect her from offenses or stumbling blocks, from spiritual deception, from spiritual starvation. You guide her, study with her.

There is an epidemic of male selfishness and irresponsibility. Christ calls *Christian* husbands to be *different*, to lead with responsible strength and sacrificial love. What a wonderful thing it is when a man is that kind of man!

**Paul's teaching to husbands is
summed up in the word *love*.**

How much? As much "as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it." The Greek word for love here is *agape*. The word is usually used for God's love, or for the love we learn from God. This love is a decision of the will, not just a feeling. It is something we choose to do. You can't "fall out of" this kind of love. It is unconditional - no strings - no matter if the person is worthy.

Jesus teaches us a whole new attitude toward other people, unselfish love. He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." As a Christian you marry to give, not just take. The spirit of this world says, "Meet my needs." Jesus says, "Meet the other's needs and you will find your needs cared for." You find life by losing it (Matthew 16:24, 25; Romans 15:1-3).

**If you are thinking of your wife
and not just of yourself,
there are some things you will do:**

You will avoid things that cut your wife down emotionally. Things such as:

Neglect, letting everything and everyone come before her. (This is especially easy to do when you are in ministry.) We men may let our job or our friends or our fun replace our wife at center of our affection.

Insensitivity to her hurts, struggles, burdens (such as household responsibilities, care and discipline of children, care of an elderly parent, hospitality, church work, her job, illness, fatigue, low self-worth, hormonal cycles.)

Not sharing your inner thoughts with her.

Harsh, constant disapproval and criticism (there is a right way to state your needs in love without tearing her down).

Comparing her negatively with others.

Ignoring her complaints. She may nag too much or get too hyper, but you need listen beyond this to hear her pain.

Reacting critically when she mentions problems (or blaming something or someone else rather than honestly accepting your responsibility).

Sexual or mental unfaithfulness. Use of pornography, or inappropriate talk with men friends, is very degrading to a wife.

You will consider certain factors affecting her emotional life, such as hereditary strengths and weaknesses (you have them too), traumas and wounds of the past, tragedies and losses, abuse, divorce or loss of parents, lack of parental love (or being without one or both parents), guilt from personal sins (the gospel can heal).

You will protect her emotionally ∅ Make the hard phone calls, deal with the complaining neighbors and the disrespectful children, protect her when she is criticized.

You will deal with your own selfishness ∅ not flop down in front of the TV or go out to play when she needs relief or time with you. Back up her discipline of the children, take your share. Require children to respect her. Take spiritual leadership in the family--church attendance, family devotionals, prayer together, spiritual training of the children, setting standards (after consulting with her).

You will build your wife up emotionally. This means meeting her greatest needs--security and significance. Recognize the good things about her. Make good things happen for her. Give her time and attention, for that is how you give her yourself. Recapture romantic feelings (we guys don't understand why this is so important, but it means the world to her). Share good things, good times. Consult with her before you make decisions. Let her know you appreciate her sexually - she is a woman to you. Give her strong, responsible dependable leadership.

Peter says a husband must treat his wife with respect.

It is not only the wife who is to respect her husband. He is to respect her also. She is another person, valuable to God, with needs and feelings. Peter calls her an "heir with you of the gracious gift of life." A husband who respects his wife will not treat her as his slave. She will not be just an object for his satisfaction (we have absorbed world's thinking). She needs *relationship*, cherishing love. Otherwise she will come to resent sex and to be cold.

The husband's prayers will be hindered if he lords it over his wife without consideration and respect.

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. - 1 Peter 3:7

The Bible never gave the husband the right to selfishly domineer his wife. Those who do will give account to God for twisting the scriptures. In Christ the object is not to be the boss, but to function in unity with the wife as a

redemptive team. If the husband has the Spirit of Christ, he wants to serve, not domineer; to give, not just to receive.

The leadership given to husbands by Christ
is leadership in humility,
with a servant spirit.

Compare Christ's directions to men who lead the church, 1 Peter 5:2, 3 NIV -

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; {3} not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

You are not a domineering lord over your wife. You need her input. Each of you sees things the other doesn't. You need to know how she is hurting and what her need are. You need to be approachable without her fearing your reaction, just as an elder of the church does. Never ridicule her or put her down when she brings her questions or needs to you. Jesus, the greatest leader, was humble with his disciples.

As her leader you are an example. Do first yourself what you want her to do. Jesus made himself holy so his followers could be holy - John 17:19. You are her shepherd. Compare Ephesians 5:25-27 NIV B

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.

For the shepherd, it is not a matter of demanding submission. He has brought the family along spiritually so that they can understand and willingly follow. The most skillful shepherd avoids confrontation where possible (though he can confront). The best leader rarely has to "pull rank." He leads from a position of servanthood and earned respect. He stays ahead of the family in spiritual growth.

Spouses are to redeem each other.

How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? - 1 Corinthians 7:16 NIV

Unbelieving or backslidden husbands may be "won over without talk by the behavior of their wives..." - 1 Peter 3:1.

The husband is to lead redemptively, humbly, as Jesus did

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. - 1 Peter 3:7 NIV

Humble leadership does not mean the wife always has her way. Gentleness is not weakness. Sometimes leadership means holding the line when you know something is right. The wife is to submit even when your decision doesn't agree with her judgment (that's what submission means).

When you have to assert leadership contrary to what your wife thinks:

- 1) Be sure you have consulted her thinking and given her a fair hearing. The healthiest leadership encourages free expression.
- 2) Remember that there are some issues a wise leader will not force. Your mate may not yet be able to handle it. Or it may be a matter of your own opinion, not a basic matter of principle. Work out compromises you can both live with.

Be sure you are in control of yourself if you expect your mate to be controlled by your leadership decisions. Do you yourself obey God and other authorities in hard things? Are your own spirit and emotions under

control? (If out of control, you lose respect, leadership.) *Self-discipline makes you credible as a leader.*

Be sure what you are requiring is for Christ, not for yourself. You can ask right things for the wrong reasons. Many marital arguments are really provoked to test the issue of control, power, to prove something. Be sure your whole approach to your relationship is loving, sacrificial. Then when you have to draw the line, you are credible.

Abuse, tantrums, pouting are never justified in a real leader. Be man enough to apologize and admit it if your decision turns out to be wrong. This also makes you credible as a leader! Our male ego is a major problem.

Sacrificial, Christlike love does not mean allowing your wife to manipulate you by emotional blackmail, tantrums, or pouting ("I'll submit but he will pay"). Anyone who manipulates others will be an unhappy person. Don't reward (reinforce) this kind of behavior. It is right to confront emotional outbursts if habitual. (But remember, you may be a contributing cause.)

A woman does not really want her husband to be so weak that he craters when she is out of control. Part of her may want it, but part doesn't. She can't respect him. All of us find security in boundaries.

Recognize that some women (like some men) have emotional problems. Your wife may need special prayer, tough love, perseverance. But you made marriage vows to her. Helping her overcome these personality problems is part of the washing, cleansing, beautifying done by a Christlike husband (Ephesians 5:25-27). The word of Christ heals lives emotionally.

Recognize special needs, weaknesses, handicaps of your wife where she needs more patience and help. Some women with insecure childhood or past traumas become domineering under stress—they need control for security. Some women lacked a father or parental love. They have greater hunger and need for acceptance, for love expressed. Remember, you also have weaknesses your wife must bear with.

A Christlike leader will handle conflicts redemptively, not combatively. Learn to approach conflicts in a way that does not put your wife on defensive and close her mind. The aim is not to win but to lead.

As husbands, may we all pray, "Lord, help me to lead my wife unselfishly, redemptively, as Christ leads the church." B. Shelburne, from a handout used in SHBI's course *The Christian Woman*

Author's Note

It is difficult for a male to write about the role of women, not having walked in their shoes. It is also difficult for him to write about masculine leadership because of the painful awareness of his own failings. Yet in scripture men like Jesus, Paul and Peter did teach on these things. These two articles are offered not because the author is worthy but because Christ in his word has given us unworldly wisdom that through humble obedience can transform our relationships.

Warning Label

A word to any wife who reads this article: Your temptation may be to take this material and use it like a club on your husband. That is one of the worst mistakes you could make and it will defeat your purpose. First, create an atmosphere of communication between the two of you, then you might offer him the article with a promise that you yourself will read the companion article, "Another Look at Feminine Submission."

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Another Look at Feminine Submission

"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." - Ephesians 5:22-24 NIV

"Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear." - 1 Peter 3:1-6 NIV

A woman discovered the above teaching about winning her husband without words. She said, "Conflict has almost destroyed our marriage. I have been trying to change my husband the world's way--nagging, complaining, fighting, resenting. If there is to be any hope for our marriage, I am going to have to learn to respond in a different way, God's way."

I am convinced that many of us look at scriptural teaching about male leadership and feminine submission from a worldly, not a spiritual viewpoint. The Corinthians did this with church leadership. In a very worldly spirit they were competing over who had the best leader, who belonged to the best circle in the church, who was number one. Paul called them infants, worldly - 1 Corinthians 3:1-5. *Our view of marriage and male-female roles can be transformed when we stop thinking like the world and look at it in the spirit of Christ.*

There is no competition between the role of husband and the role of wife in Christian marriage.

Things are totally different in the kingdom of God. Power is not an issue; cooperating redemptively is. Husband and wife are not competitors but are on the same team. The two roles are different but neither less valuable or essential; just as Christ is equally divine with the Father and yet voluntarily submits to him. Just as members of the body have different functions but that doesn't make one less valuable. Husband and wife are each a whole person in his/her own right. Each should voluntarily accept his or her role and cooperate for greatest good. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" - 2 Cor. 3:17. We freely choose to accept the role God has given.

The male-female contest belongs to the world and to the fallen nature. [In Christ] "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, *male nor female*, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" - Galatians 3:28 [italics mine]. The Galatians were all equally saved, valued and accepted by God. They still had various positions and roles in life (Jew-Greek, slave-free, male-female) but worldly competition was replaced by redemptive unity and cooperation.

In her role of submission to the husband's leadership, the wife is vulnerable.

Her position is even more difficult if her husband is not listening to God. Peter says she may "win him without words" by her attitude and behavior. The "nag-withdraw" cycle is typical in these situations. Because she is hurting, she nags. He responds by withdrawing. Offended by this, she nags harder, increasing his withdrawal, etc. This vicious cycle eventually destroys the relationship.

The wife's nagging only makes things worse, because he becomes more defensive, less willing to listen. His wife reminds him of his mother standing over him. *This pushes the wrong button!* As marriage deteriorates into a power struggle, it is two opponents, not two working together. Each manipulates the other to gain advantage. Each may

punish the other (including sexual coldness).

When there is a stand-off, it is like two people facing each other, each pushing with hands against the other's hands. They can go on forever this way. What happens if one stops pushing? A change from stalemate? Maybe it is time to stop dealing with your marriage the world's way and try the kingdom way. Each spouse has a share of responsibility but no marriage gets better until I stop concentrating on my mate's failings and focus on my own.

Biblical submission does not make the wife a non-person. It makes her strong and free.

God's thoughts are not like our thoughts - Isaiah 55:8,9. Submission is like "finding life by losing it," or "to be greatest, you must become least of all." If you think as a worldly person, this is nonsense, another male effort at domination. Maybe the real issue is whether scripture is God's word, whether it contains higher wisdom for us than the world offers. Scripture presents feminine submission as a voluntary, quiet respect. Peter says this is a woman's real femininity, unfading beauty. This quietness does not mean she cannot express herself fully. It actually makes her husband able to listen. A husband is foolish not to want his wife's input. (See companion article on *Male Leadership*). Submission because one chooses to is very different from submitting because one has to.

There is tremendous power in submission.

It is what Jesus did. Look at submission in 1 Peter:

"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority..." - 1 Peter 2:13 NIV

"Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, *leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.* 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." [italics mine] - 1 Peter 2:18-25 NIV

"Wives, in the same way [referring back to Christ's example above] be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives..." [italics and brackets mine] - 1 Peter 3:1 NIV

"Husbands, in the same way [as Christ did] be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." [italics and brackets mine] - 1 Peter 3:7 NIV

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but *eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples* to the flock." [italics mine] - 1 Peter 5:2-3 NIV

"Young men, in the same way *be submissive* to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with *humility* toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." [italics mine] - 1 Peter 5:5 NIV

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." - 1 Peter 5:6-7 NIV

Note that we are all commanded to submit to God and to each other - 1 Peter 5:6; Ephesians 5:21. The root problem of all of us, men and women, is a selfish, proud, independent spirit that does not want to submit to God or to others. This turns the world against each other. This is what destroys marriages, churches, nations.

All of these commands in 1 Peter are tied to the example of Jesus' submission on the cross - 1 Peter 2:21-25. This is foolishness to the world - 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 - but it is the spiritual truth that redeems and transforms our lives. It is the world's only hope.

Jesus changed the world through submission. To the world, "servant" or "slave" is a bad word. Yet Jesus "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Greek: bond-slave) - Philippians 2:7. He made the word beautiful. In Jesus it is those who submit who are free - 1 Corinthians 7:21, 22.

The husband is called to as much submission as the wife. Just before the section about submission of wives, Paul says, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" - Ephesians 5:21 NIV. Loving her enough to lay down his life for her daily like Christ did for the church requires as much submission as her respecting his leadership does.

A wife is naturally afraid to let go and entrust herself to her husband's leadership.

Peter urges wives to be "like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and *do not give way to fear*" [italics mine] - 1 Peter 3:6 NIV. It can be scary, yet this is the kind of trust God calls the wife to in her role. The wife does not submit only when she thinks her husband is right (this would be judging, not submitting). Or because her husband is always right. Or because her husband is a good husband (Compare 1 Peter 2:18 NIV -- "Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.")

The godly wife chooses to submit because 1) God has given leadership to her husband; 2) it is "as to the Lord" - Ephesians. 5:22; and 3) it is "as the church submits to Christ" - Eph. 5:24.

A husband should want his wife to express herself, should welcome her input. But if there has been a power struggle, she may have conditioned him to be defensive. He will listen better if he does not have to fight for his leadership. And the time comes for her to step back and really let him lead. This includes the freedom to make mistakes. According to Peter, she is to trust God and quietly accept her husband's leadership, leaving the consequences to God.

Does she fear disaster? Peter counsels her not to "give way to fear." "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" - 1 Peter 5:7 NIV. Trust God enough to do things his way in marriage. God can discipline your husband if he needs it. God may do this by letting him reap consequences of his leadership choices.

There is a great difference between submitting because you have to (the world's way) and submitting because you choose to (Christ's way).

Submitting out of necessity is the way of migraines, stored up resentment, damaged emotional and physical intimacy. Submitting because you choose to with your whole heart is the way of freedom from inner conflict, and powerful, redemptive living in the steps of Jesus, our example of gracious submission.

In Christ the issue is not "Who is greatest?" Both husband and wife are submitted to Christ and to each other's needs. They have "changed and become like little children" - Matthew 18:3. They serve together in complementary roles. They are not on opposite sides but rejoice to serve each other in love. As a team they minister redemptively. They join Jesus in laying down their rights and taking up the cross daily for the needs of others. This, in contrast to the worldly way, brings wonderful freedom.

▾ B. Shelburne

Author's Note

It is difficult for a male to write about the role of women, not having walked in their shoes. It is also difficult for him to write about masculine leadership because of the painful awareness of his own failings. Yet in scripture men like Jesus, Paul and Peter did teach on these things. These two articles are offered not because the author is worthy but because Christ in his word has given us unworldly wisdom that through humble obedience can transform our relationships.

Warning Label

A word to any husband who reads this article: Your temptation may be to take this material and use it like a club on your wife. That is one of the worst mistakes you could make and it will defeat your purpose. First, create an atmosphere of communication between the two of you, then you might offer her the article with a sincere promise that you yourself will read the companion article, "Another Look at Masculine Leadership."

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Extra Handout: **The Christian Family - Lesson 15**

Restoring Troubled Marriages

Introduction: Marriages, like people, weaken, get sick, and die. Sometimes a marriage though still in existence is terminally ill because too much of the will to save it has been lost. But many troubled marriages can be treated, given vitamins, brought back to full life, and even made better than before. Troubled marriages can be helped where there is willingness to be honest with oneself and to submit to God's teaching. [Unless context indicates otherwise, "he", etc., is used generically in this lesson.]

1. One partner can often turn a marriage around. His obedience to what God has commanded him (men: sacrificial, cherishing love; women: gentle, respectful submission) may create or encourage obedience in his mate. Most marriage therapy starts with only one mate willing to try (though the best therapy occurs where both are present at counseling sessions and willing to work on the relationship). One partner who decides to, can inject love and positivity back into a marriage.
2. Start with yourself. Though both partners may be at fault in different ways, a marriage begins to heal when each partner confines his attention primarily to his own faults and treats them as seriously as if they were the whole problem -- Matthew 7:1-5; 1 Peter 3:1,2. "What do I contribute to the weakening of our marriage?"
3. Sincere unilateral effort by one partner will often soften the other and encourage him to try. Even if this result doesn't occur, the partner who tries has the peace of knowing he did what he could.
4. Frequently the greatest hindrances to revival of a marriage are *defensiveness* and *discouragement*. Many failed marriages had problems that were quite fixable but defensiveness or discouragement kept it from happening. In marital conflict, it is as if the two partners were pushing against each other with all their might, producing a permanent standoff. They keep repeating the same cycle and getting the same results, with more and more erosion of the relationship. But if even one partner will take a new look and begin responding in a new way, deadlock can be broken.
 - A. Overcoming defensiveness: In a conflicted marriage, each mate often feels attacked and unfairly criticized by the other. But a mate can step back and take a fresh look at the expressed grievances of the other. Ask yourself, "Laying aside all the emotional exaggeration and unfair language, what is the real pain or need that my partner is trying to communicate? What legitimate message have I missed because I have been too busy defending myself? (Jesus says truth sets us free, and we have to be humble enough to listen for and accept the truths we need to learn about ourselves. This is where sincere Christians should have a great advantage over unbelievers.)"
 - B. Avoiding discouragement: Progress may seem so slow, and we sometimes slip back into the old hurts or abuses. Recovering a marriage is hard work that takes patience and a belief that the effort is well worth it. It helps to remember that
 - 1) Discouragement itself is often our greatest problem and we can decide not to let it win.
 - 2) Though God will not violate people's free will, he can bring about changes that

are humanly impossible. (Our job is to obey his teaching in our own life and trust God to do the God-sized things).

- 3) You yourself may grow in God and become more able to contribute to healing.
- 4) God may help you to see new healing approaches and behaviors that you have not tried.
- 5) We need to keep in mind the awful costs of failing.

5. Surface grievances are only symptoms of deeper root problems. These root attitudes must be discovered and dealt with before much real healing can occur.

6. What makes a person beautiful is more inward than outward - 1 Peter 3:3, 4. This is the kind of beauty or appeal that holds a mate. Sexual attraction or physical beauty alone cannot.

7. The times of greatest danger to marriage are 1) the transition from the honeymoon stage; 2) the beginning of childbearing; 3) during the children's adolescence; 4) when the last child leaves; 5) during mid-life crisis; and 6) at retirement.

8. Major issues in marital conflict include: in-laws, communication, finances, work, children, remarriage adjustments, self-concept, violence, unfaithfulness, time, sex and religion. Dr. James Dobson says over-commitment is the greatest enemy of the family today. We have no time to nourish relationships. Sometimes work or other busy involvement becomes a means of withdrawal or an alternate way of finding fulfillment.

9. What can be done about marriage problems:

In Christian marriages, the bottom line is our commitment to one another. We remember the vows we made before God and in obedience to God and we decide to make the efforts and the changes necessary to save and improve our relationship. Sometimes that commitment is all we have to hold us together until we can rekindle the feelings that have been lost. (Remember that *agape* love, the kind of love we are not born with but learn from God and receive by his Spirit, is not a feeling but a decision to act lovingly. It is unconditional, no-strings, something we decide to do in order to be like God, regardless of the unworthiness of our mate.) Below are some approaches to resolving problems in marriage:

A. Loss of communication:

- 1) Study different types of communication problems, manners that defeat communication, and eliminate them (Wright, 284-305).
- 2) Study methods of improving communication (Wright, 306-326).
- 3) Recognize and deal with behavior and attitudes that stifle communication by hardening the partner's heart.
- 4) Make more time for one another, and give undivided attention to each other.
- 5) Florence Beinenfeld's communication therapy: First, one mate then the other lists verbally to the other his grievances ("I resent..."). Second, each mate tells the other his regrets ("I'm sorry for..." or "I regret..."). Third, each mate expresses his

concerns ("I'm concerned about..."). Fourth, each expresses his wants ("I want from you..."). Fifth, each states his "must haves" ("I must have from you..."). Sixth, each mate expresses what he is willing to do ("I am willing to..."). (Wright, pp. 327-337).

6) Raymond J. Corsini's "Marriage Conference." (Wright, 337-351).

B. Conflicts: (See Wright, 247-283 for the following principles)

- 1) Define the issues
- 2) Learn to really listen to your mate rather than concentrate on defending yourself.
- 3) Select the most appropriate time to talk.
- 4) Remove the negative and inflammatory ways of expressing yourself.
- 5) Narrow the conflict issues to specifics.
- 6) Identify your own contribution to the problem.
- 7) Identify possible solutions.
- 8) Decide on a mutually acceptable solution.
- 9) Adopt new behavior accordingly.
- 10) Where conflict arises from step family relationships, study some of the excellent material available on merging step families.

C. Loss of love and good will:

- 1) Re-focus on your courtships days to rekindle love. What attracted you to each other?
- 2) List the pluses of your mate as well as his minuses.
- 3) Contract or covenant therapy: Each mate promises to exchange a form of pleasing behavior for one desired from his mate. (Wright, 169-192).
- 4) Richard Stewart's "Caring Days" - Each mate lists a number of specific small behaviors desired from his partner, not related to the conflict issues, and each partner agrees to perform at least 5 of the items daily. Score is kept by the mate, and the performance of each mate is discussed in counseling sessions. (Wright, 131-144).
- 5) Study specific behaviors for rekindling romantic love. Lists are available, and you can read such books as McGinnis, The Friendship Factor.
- 6) Reduce commitments or alter lifestyle so as to spend more time together (take a hard look at what occupies your time). If you were in a lifeboat which was about to sink from being overloaded, what items would you throw overboard in order to

save the lives of the people on board? Sometimes we have to get that real about life.

- 7) Remember that the love the Bible commands in marriage is first a decision of the will, rather than a feeling. When the decision is made and carried out, the feeling will gradually follow.

D. Sexual Difficulties:

- 1) Take a positive, wholesome, Biblical view of sex. Shed any unscriptural prudishness or inhibition inherited from the past, regarding sex within your marriage. To see God's positive attitude about sex, read the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament; also Hebrews 13:4.
- 2) Clear the past spiritually and emotionally if there is sexual guilt or trauma in your past. This may require the help of a trustworthy Christian counselor.
- 3) Remember and practice the two great keys to good sex in marriage: the man is to give his wife relationship beyond the bedroom, and the wife is to give her husband responsiveness and interest in sex.
- 4) Study a good book or tape album (produced from a Christian perspective) on sexual problems and techniques in marriage (such as Dr. Wheat's book *Intended for Pleasure* or his tape album *Sex Techniques and Sex Problems in Marriage* - contact Scripture Counsel, 1-800-643-3477).
- 5) See a medical doctor or Christian-oriented sex therapist if difficulties persist. Be careful about your choice of a therapist - get referral from a trusted Christian counselor.

E. Unfaithfulness:

- 1) The guilty partner must absolutely burn his bridges and cut all ties with the lover. He must repent and make things right with God and his partner.
- 2) Discover what need of the unfaithful partner made him vulnerable and learn a wholesome, lawful way to fulfill it.
- 3) Deal with weaknesses in the marriage which opened the door to unfaithfulness.
- 4) Let both partners get any necessary counseling to mature themselves emotionally and spiritually and deal with weaknesses.
- 5) Both partners should keep themselves as pleasing to each other as possible.
- 6) Beware of the middle years and work harder than ever on your marriage.

F. General:

- 1) Rekindle your spiritual life. Get close to God. Be active in worship. Have regular private Bible study and prayer, and have devotions daily with your mate or family.

Draw close to Christians in the church and fellowship with them for encouragement. Become part of a spiritual small group.

- 2) Read or study such good materials on strengthening marriage as Dr. Wheat's excellent book and tape album, *Love Life for Every Married Couple*.
- 3) Get counsel from a respected minister or church leader on a pastoral level.
- 4) If necessary, get counsel from a Christian-oriented marriage counselor.
- 5) Recognize and change negative thought-life. Recognize thought-patterns contributing to marital trouble and reject them.
- 6) Correct if possible any health problems affecting your emotions, sexual performance, appearance, etc. Remember that if you are looking through a negative emotional lens, everything will look worse than it is.
- 7) Keep yourself as attractive, clean and pleasing to your mate as possible.
- 8) Make more time for one another. *Do not let the children take precedence* over your partner in attention and affection.
- 9) Use sexual giving to warm your overall relationship, and improve your relationship in order to warm your sex life.

Conclusion: God expects us where possible to deal with our marital problems and strengthen our marriages so that we can keep the commitment we made in the marriage covenant and enjoy all the good that God intended in marriage. God is against divorce (Malachi 2:13-16; Matthew 19:3-9; 5:31, 32; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16). And we cannot afford the spiritual and emotional costs of divorce to mates and children.

Note: The book by H. Norman Wright referred to throughout the outline is Marital Counseling: A Biblically Based, Behavioral, Cognitive Approach (Christian Marriage Enrichment, Denver, Co, 1981)

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