

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

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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

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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, and 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." cB. 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 Submission."

