

A Biblical View of Marriage

Part II

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In Part I of this teaching we examined the responsibilities of both the husband and wife laid out by Paul in Ephesians 5.

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.

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--for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (Eph 5:22-33 NIV)

We also looked at how different personality types as well as experiences before marriage affect the husband/wife relationship. Let us continue our study by first examining how a marriage should work in the spirit realm.

Spirit Realm

Husband as the Spiritual Head of the Household

We all know that two realms exist, the natural realm (the physical world), and the spirit realm (God, the angels, Satan, and demonic beings). Every human being is subject to and operates in both realms. Every marriage also operates in both realms. In the spirit realm, the husband has the ultimate responsibility for the spiritual covering over his wife and children. He acquired this responsibility the day he took his marriage vows. When he accepted the title and position of husband, he also accepted headship over his family. As the spiritual head of the family, his responsibilities include ongoing prayer for the family, regular Bible reading, protection (both natural and spiritual) of the household, and guidance (both natural and spiritual) when the family needs it. But to maintain that headship, *the husband must exercise his spiritual authority*.

I think every Christian husband knows he should be praying for his family every day, reading his Bible, and so on. But many husbands do not realize they also should be providing spiritual protection over their families. By spiritual protection I mean the husband taking on the demonic world on behalf of his wife and children. I base this statement, in part, on Ephesians 6:12 and 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, which tell us that we have authority over all powers of darkness. Every husband, as spiritual head of the household, has the responsibility to declare his family off limits to the spiritual forces of darkness. Here is how I do it. During my

prayer time each day, I ask the Lord for a momentary leave from my prayers to Him so that I can address the demonic realm. Then I say, "I hereby make this declaration to Satan, thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, rulers of darkness, fallen angels, and every demon. I say to you that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. He, Jesus, has given me, Jim Murphy, authority over you. With this authority I bind you. You may not touch, harm, or molest in any manner [here I name all of my family members]. You are bound. So be it." Then I return to my prayers to the Lord. I cannot overemphasize how important it is that we husbands fulfill this obligation daily.

But what happens when the Christian husband does not exercise his proper spiritual headship? Sadly, there is a crack in the foundation of the marriage. At a minimum there is a spiritual imbalance within the family. Sadly, although the couple tries to continue to build their marriage, it will never be really right because the foundation is not solid. Of course, if the husband is not a Christian, there is always this lack of proper spiritual headship by him. When a wife becomes aware of this spiritual void, she must, by default, step in and exercise that authority herself. This is not what God ordained as His best in any marriage but it is better for the wife to do it than it not be done at all. Finally and obviously, when a woman does not have a husband but has children, then she is the head of the household and it is her right and responsibility to exercise this spiritual headship.

Husband as Servant-Leader

Although these words are not set forth in black and white in Paul's instructions in Ephesians 5, it is very plain that since the husband is the head of the household, he has the inherent responsibility to lead. The body does not lead the head. The church does not lead Jesus. Fortunately, there are many husbands in the church who have an understanding of servant headship and leadership and are graciously going about it. But many Christian husbands are not proper leaders of their families. They generally fall into one of three categories.

1) The Boss - The boss makes all plans and decisions alone. He never consults his wife. He simply tells her what to do. Her opinion doesn't matter. She is certainly not his partner, she is more like his servant.

2) The Weakling - The weakling simply follows his wife around letting her make all decisions and generally complying with her wishes. This most often happens because the wife is a strong person and the husband isn't. Some Christian men who fall into this category try to explain it by saying, "I'm laying down my life for my wife." I don't think so. What is happening in fact is that he has abandoned his position of headship and has become a follower because it is the path of least resistance. It's simply easier for him to follow than to lead.

3) Self-centered - The self-centered husband immerses himself in his own world. The most important things in his life are *his* job, *his* recreational activity, what *he* wants to buy, etc. He doesn't allow his wife into his world. Like the boss, this kind of husband usually wants his wife to serve him, not to be his teammate.

In all three of these illustrations, the wife is like a plant that doesn't get watered. She certainly doesn't bloom in her husband's love. She more likely withers. Inevitably there will be friction in the marriage. I once heard a geologist say that there is no such thing as an extinct volcano. Every volcano is subject to coming to life and erupting again. The unwatered wife, like the sleeping volcano, may seem tranquil and peaceful but one day she "blows her top."

Probably the saddest consequence of these imbalanced marriages is that, if these problems are not corrected using biblical principles, this model of marriage will be passed on to the children. They will suffer because of the sins of their parents. They will learn the bad habits of their parents. Though the children may see the problem and hate it, as adults they will most likely do the very same things! As Christians we dare not allow this to happen. Children should not have to pay the price for this dysfunctional husband/wife relationship.

Husband's Prayers Not Answered

Peter wrote, "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 Pet 3:7 NIV, emphasis added.) The implication is plain. Any husband who doesn't treat his wife with consideration and respect will have hindrances in getting his prayers answered! Men, let's not be stupid! The better we treat our wives the more effectively our prayers will be answered!

Dominant Spiritual Gifts in Both Spouses

Scripture tells us that God has given specific spiritual gifts to every believer. (See 1 Cor 12:11.) Both husband and wife will have dominant as well as secondary gifts. These will probably not be the same in both the husband and wife.

Each spouse must learn to recognize, respect, and honor the spiritual gifts in the other spouse. When the wife is moving in her gifting, the husband should allow her to exercise that gift without his interference. This applies equally to the wife when the husband is moving in his gifts. As I have said, I am a called teacher and my wife is a called prophet. The Lord told me years ago in no uncertain terms that when He wound up my wife and sent her out as a prophet, I was not to interfere. Does that mean she is not submitted to my spiritual headship? Not at all. Carolyn fully acknowledges my leadership in our family. But when she is operating in her gift, my job is to be supportive of her just as she is supportive of my teaching gift.

A word of caution here: no ministry or use of our gifts should be so overdone that the family is neglected. Our responsibilities to the church must always be balanced to include caring for and loving our families.

Natural Realm

Getting the Job Done Within The Family

Remember, every family operates in both the spiritual and the natural realm. In the natural realm there are everyday decisions which need to be made and tasks which must be completed to run a household. These necessarily include a division of labor. Often this division of labor evolves as the natural skills and abilities of each spouse are recognized and developed. This may or may not

include a gender-specific role division. For example, the husband may like to cook and be a better cook than the wife. Or the wife may be better at repairing mechanical things than her husband.

While the husband is the spiritual head of a household, the natural areas of responsibility need to be divided between the husband and wife. I mean things like handling the money, cooking, household chores, having jobs outside the home, and so on. I don't believe Scripture specifically addresses these topics. In fact, if we pattern our household after the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31, all the husband does is eat, sleep and sit in the company of other men all day! His wife runs the house, makes clothes, plants vineyards, buys and sells property, and manages the household servants, all the while rising early and staying up late! Certainly this Scripture extolls the virtue of a fine woman but I don't think we are to infer that her husband does nothing all day.

What I am saying is that, in a marriage, whatever skills and talents either partner has, he or she is to use them for mutual benefit. If the husband earns the family income but can't skillfully manage money while the wife can, by all means, give the money to the wife to manage. If the wife is not a good cook, but the husband is, then let him do the cooking. If both agree on the division of these natural duties, there is no strife and it works for that couple.

Let me again use my own marriage as an example. Carolyn is a retired attorney. Whenever a legal matter comes up in the Murphy household, I defer to her. I would not be wise to tell her, who practiced law for twenty years, to step aside and let me handle the legal matter simply because I am the head of the household! I'm not that stupid. Conversely, when our automobile needs maintenance, I don't expect Carolyn to take care of it. I know how to do it and that's my responsibility.

The Root Problem is Control

Much of what I have said in this teaching really boils down to an issue of control. Who will be in control of what in a marriage relationship? We all want control. Some of us are very direct in wanting things done our way. Others of us use manipulation, emotional outbursts, anger, or whatever else works to get our way.

Making Major Decisions - Part of learning to be a godly husband or wife is learning when and how to give up control. In other words, learning to be a team. Take the example of the times in every marriage when the couple has a major decision to make. How do all the factors we have discussed work in practicality? The Bible says, "... that the testimony of two men is valid." (Jn 8:17 NIV) I believe that every major decision that affects our family should be made jointly by my wife and me. We discuss the matter in detail. If, after a thorough, prayerful discussion, Carolyn and I are of the same mind concerning the decision, then we take that as being the right decision. I believe God honors these joint decisions.

If we don't immediately agree, we both pray about the matter, sometimes for days or weeks. Usually this prayer focus is enough to cause us to come to an agreement on the decision, even if we continue discussing it while praying. Please note: *we do nothing on any important matter until we are in agreement about it.* For example, if one of us wants to buy something and the other doesn't, we do not buy it until there is agreement. Carolyn and I practice this principle. When there is no unity, we wait. After two

or three weeks of time and prayer, we again discuss the matter. I will not make a major decision without my wife's agreement.

However, there are times when one must make a decision quickly. If the unity is not present, the husband should make the decision and the wife should yield in faith, trusting God. But remember, if a wife knows her husband is a godly man who listens to her and assumes his proper and godly headship, it is much easier for her to yield.

There is one final area in which my wife yields to my decision if we are not in agreement. When it comes to a decision relating to any ministry to which the Lord has directly called me. We discuss it, we pray about it, and we discuss it again. If we are still not in agreement, Carolyn gives me her opinion but releases me to do what I think is best. Of course, my responsibility in all this is to listen to her and to seek the Lord so that His will, not mine, be done.

Tools to Resolve Problem Areas

Wives

1. Pray for Your Husbands - The best advice I can give any wife is to pray for your husband. A wonderful passage to pray for you husband is Eph 1:15-23. Ask the Holy Spirit to show him the love laid out in those verses. Ask the Holy Spirit to give him an understanding of the spiritual power and authority he has as the head of your household. Be led by the Holy Spirit in your prayers and pray continually for your husband.

2. Listen to Your Husbands - Many men just aren't good communicators. Ask your husband questions and then LISTEN to his answers. Don't interrupt him, don't correct him, and don't get mad at him for his answers. For example, one question you can ask is, "If money were not an issue, what would you really like to do in the next five years?" You can learn a tremendous amount about your husband by just getting him to talk and listening carefully to what he says.

3. Create a Safe Setting for Communication - This goes along with getting you husband to talk to you. He must feel free to express his true feelings and ideas. He needs to believe that you won't get mad or correct him. That will just frustrate him and usually end in a fight. (Husbands, if your wife has problems communicating with you, then these same tools can help her open up and talk to you.)

Husbands

1. Pray About Your Problems - If you have a problem in any of the areas we have discussed, the most important thing you can do is to pray and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance and freedom from the things that have kept you bound.

2. Communicate With Your Wife - If there is one overriding complaint wives have, it's that their husbands don't talk to them. One of the best ways I know of loving my wife is to just sit and talk with her, listen to her, and respond with my own ideas and thoughts. Communication goes a long way to solving any problem between a husband and wife.

3. Seek Godly Counsel from Other Godly Men - If you have problems, either in your marriage or in any other area of your life, go to godly men for help. Make yourself accountable to these men. Both you and your marriage will be greatly

strengthened.

How Husbands and Wives Can Pray

1. Pray Together - Every husband and wife should pray aloud together frequently.

2. Pray Until Agreement - If you are not able to agree on something, agree with each other to pray separately for a season and then get back together and try again. It usually works!

3. Pray In Agreement - Agree that both parties will pray a certain way about an issue or problem. Carolyn and I often will discuss a person or situation and then come to an agreement about how we should pray for that person or situation. Then we both pray the same way, sometimes for days, or weeks, or sometimes indefinitely, until we feel the Lord is changing the focus of our prayers. This is a wonderful way to bring a spiritual and emotional closeness between a husband and wife.

Spiritual Checklist for Husbands

Finally, I have prepared this spiritual checklist for husbands. Even if you don't start out with a high score, don't get discouraged. A good marriage requires work!

1. Do you read your Bible each day?
2. Do you pray in a focused way each day?
3. Do you pray focused prayers for each family member as needed?
4. Do you cover your family spiritually every day?

Remember my example of addressing the demonic world daily and declaring my family off limits to their schemes.

5. Are you actively involved in a ministry?

Every Christian has a ministry in the body of Christ. There are ministries of service, giving, ministering, teaching, administration, and so forth. Every person, and especially every man, should be involved in a local ministry.

6. Do you talk problems through thoroughly with your wife?

Most men avoid deep conversations, especially when such conversations involve troubles or difficulties in the family. There are four levels of communication.

- 1) Superficial: "How about that ball game?!"
- 2) Exchange of information: "There's a meeting tonight."
- 3) Exchange of ideas: Topical discussions like politics.
- 4) Innermost thoughts and feelings: "It really hurt me when you said . . ."

Most men are usually good communicators up through level three but fail miserably and avoid at all costs level four. But level four is where we resolve family and relational problems. Men must learn to move freely in level four discourse if they are to master intimate communication with their wives.

7. Do you criticize your church (or others) within the hearing of your children?

There are times when husband-wife discussions legitimately involve problems in the church or with other people. It is very tempting to ignore the presence of children during these discussions, but to do so is very detrimental to them. Children live in a black and white, right and wrong world. Based on your conversations they will often make wrong decisions regarding the church and/or people you are discussing, then grow up with these opinions. To you the problem may have been minor and temporary, but it can have a permanent affect on your child's mind.

8. Do you gracefully receive admonition when it's deserved?

None of us like to be admonished, but Scripture tells that we are to receive admonition. "By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples." (Neh 9:30 NIV) God often admonishes us and it is always for our good. Listen to these Proverbs, "If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you." (Pro 1:23 NIV) And, "He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise. (Pro 15:31 NIV)

It is easy when admonition comes from one of my Christian brothers, but when God uses *my wife* . . . !

9. Do you take Eph. 5:22-33 seriously?

10. Do you keep short accounts?

By short accounts I mean that you deal with problems in a marriage relationship then put them behind you. Once you have discussed and forgiven a transgression, never bring it up again. The habit of some spouses to always drag up past sins and shortcomings to be used as weapons against his or her mate is sin in itself. Once forgiveness has taken place, it is under the blood of Jesus where even God doesn't remember it anymore. If God doesn't remember it, neither should we!

Conclusion

God has ordained marriage as one of the most fulfilling aspects of life. The closer we come to walking in the fullness of Ephesians 5:22-33, the more we fulfill ourselves and our spouses. As Christians, one of the best ways we can be a light in this dark world is to model a Christ-like marriage to our family, our church, our community, and to the lost!

[End Note: We fully understand that this teaching has not addressed all aspects of marriage such as forgiveness, child raising (training and discipline), an unbelieving spouse, marital infidelity, substance addictions, and so forth. But we thought that a teaching to encourage and instruct the joint efforts of a believing husband-wife team in the body of Christ was both needed and worthy of presentation.

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