

2024 Valley Bible Church Parenting Workshop

Topic 3 Extra Study – Husband’s Role

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Introduction

Problems in marriage can be traced to the first marital failures and subsequent curses imposed by God on Adam and Eve and their descendants at the Fall from sinlessness. Specifically, problems in marriage stem from the failure to live out the Biblical roles for the husband and wife that were the center of the failure at the Fall: servant leadership of the husband and respectful submission of the wife. Nowadays as well, the main problem issues in marriages result from not following these God-designed roles.

Power to Glorify God

God tells us in His Word that the believer will continue to battle against flesh (see for example Rom 7:22-23 and 1 Pet 2:11). God also gives us the key to living a life that is pleasing to Him which is “walking in the Spirit”. It is the indwelling Holy Spirit that provides the power to wage victorious war with the flesh. “Walking in the Spirit” is also described as “being filled with the Spirit.”

¹¹Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to **abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.** (1 Pet 2:11)

¹⁶But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.** ¹⁷For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. (Gal 5:16-17)

Living a consistently God glorifying life is only possible through Spirit-filling. The Christian life is not lived in one’s own strength. It is a life lived filled with the Spirit as the life of Christ flows through you.

When a believer is submitted to God (Eph 5:18-6:9) and His Word (Col 3:16-4:1), the indwelling Holy Spirit fills (or controls) them and produces Christ-like character, heart motives, attitudes, words, and reactions. The believer in a right relationship with God will be filled with the Spirit. This is the usual, expected state of a believer. Being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18) is also described as “letting the word of Christ richly dwell within you” (Col 3:16), “abiding in Christ” (John 15:1-11), “setting apart Christ as Lord in your heart” (1 Pet 3:15), “living by faith in the Son of God” (Gal 2:20), “abiding in Christ” (John 15:3-5), and “presenting your body a living and holy sacrifice” (Rom 12:1-2).

As the believer repents of all known sin (Eph 4:30), bows before God in complete submission (1 Thess 5:19) and is immersed in the Word (Col 3:16), they we will be filled with the Spirit and will therefore exhibit the fruits of the Spirit. If we find ourselves sinning and therefore bowed before a master other than the Lord, then we must repent and bow again before the Lord. As we repent and once again bow before the Lord as master, we will be filled with the Spirit and the life of Christ will flow through us. It is then that we will have the power to live a God-glorifying life exhibiting God’s character (the fruits of the Spirit).

In Ephesians 5:18 through 6:9 we see that the results of Spirit filling are:

- God glorifying words (5:19)
- God glorifying heart worship (5:19)
- God glorifying attitudes (5:20)
- God glorifying relationships (5:21-6:9) including marriage relationships

Therefore, the key to a God glorifying marriage is Spirit filling. Let's look at the Spirit-empowered roles (duties) of the husband.

He Loves His Wife as Christ Loved the Church

First, a husband seeking to glorify God in his marriage must love his wife as Christ loves the church. God's Word explains clearly the love a husband ought to have for his wife.

Ephesians 5:21-33 serves as a starting point for this aspect of the marriage. From there, other passages and principles can be incorporated to get a full, accurate, and biblical view of the husband's role to love his wife.

¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but **be filled with the Spirit**,¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; ²¹and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. ²²Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. ²⁴But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. ²⁵**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her**, ²⁶so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸**So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself**; ²⁹**for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church**, ³⁰because we are members of His body. ³¹FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. ³²This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. ³³**Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself**, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband. (Eph 5:21-33)

Notably, the only direct imperatives aimed at the husband all have to do with loving his wife. In the Biblical Counseling movement there tends to be an undue amount of responsibility placed on husbands to sanctify their wives. However, when examined closely there is no command for the husband to sanctify his wife. Paul simply expounds on why Christ gave Himself up for the church in verses 26-27. A woman's sanctification in a marriage is not completely on the husband. Each person's sanctification regardless of their age or marital status is purely the work of the Holy Spirit as the believer cooperates with Him through interaction with the Word and submission to it. There is no extra, spiritual ability for a husband to bring about sanctification in his wife.

Nevertheless, due to the closeness and intimacy of the marriage relationship, the husband has the greatest opportunity to use the marriage relationship to glorify God by exemplifying, encouraging, and inspiring spiritual growth in his wife.

The command is clear that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Love is the sacrificial commitment of your will to your wife's needs and best interests regardless of the cost to yourself. Love is a choice. Love drove God to give (John 3:16) His son for you. God demonstrates His own love toward you, in that while you were yet sinners, Christ died for you (Rom 5:8). Love seeks your wife's highest good, even if it costs a great deal; even if there is no response of love or gratitude.

Christ's love for His church appears in many passages throughout the NT. Christ's love is...

1. *Initiatory* – A husband ought to love his wife without waiting for any reason to love her. He must not wait until he deems her “lovable.” He must choose to initiate love just as Christ loved us when we did not deserve to be loved.

¹⁹We love because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

❖ **Do you initiate love, even to those who seem unlovely?**

2. *Sacrificial* – Christ showed His ultimate act of love when he went to the cross and paid the sacrifice for our sins. A husband seeking to glorify God in his marriage should be willing to sacrifice moment-by-moment for his wife. This sacrifice should be in the big and small things of life.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and **gave himself up for her...** (Eph 5:25)

❖ **Do you sacrificial love your wife?**

3. *Humble* – As Christ's disciples we are to follow His perfect example of humble love as explained in Philippians 2. The Christ-like husband constantly bears in mind that he is God's slave and loves with humility.

³Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:3-8)

❖ **Do you consider your wife as more important than yourself?**

4. *Volitional* – Some of the last words Jesus spoke to His disciples before being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane show that He made the conscious decision to choose to love His disciples. His love for them was a willful love not based on their ability to love Him or to do what He commanded them. He chose to love and lead them during His earthly ministry even though He knew they were broken, unreliable, weak sinners.

¹⁶**You did not choose Me but I chose you**, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. (John 15:16)

❖ **Do you make a conscious choice to love your wife?**

5. *Unconditional* – Christ’s ultimate act of love at the cross was done for ungodly sinners. The Christ-like husband cannot wait until his wife is “godly enough” to love. If he did this, hypothetically speaking, he would never love his wife. Even when a wife is sinning against her husband in the worst way, he needs to choose to love her since Christ loved His bride, the church, unconditionally.

⁶For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:6-8)

❖ **Do you put conditions on how and when you extend love to your wife?**

6. *Eternal and Committed* – Nothing will separate Christ’s love from His bride. The Christ-like husband has this mentality of eternal commitment to love his bride.

³⁷But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 8:37-39)

❖ **Are you committed to your wife no matter what?**

7. *Forgiving* – Being quick to forgive and thorough in that forgiveness is a key for the Christ-like husband. Christ chose to forgive us before we came to Him asking for it and he forgave us unconditionally. For an extended study on forgiveness, see Biblical Solutions for Life Issues class on the VBC website, Topic 12 on Forgiveness.

¹³...bearing with one another, and **forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.** (Col 3:13)

❖ **Do you extend unconditional forgiveness to your wife?**

8. *Nourishing and Cherishing* – The believing husband is to nourish and cherish his wife. Nourish means to nurture, providing for physically and emotionally. This would also include providing for her physical life needs. Cherish means to tenderly care for.

²⁹for no one ever hated his own flesh, but **nourishes and cherishes** it, just as Christ also *does* the church, (Eph 5:29)

⁷But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* **tenderly cares** for her own children. (1 Thess 2:7)

❖ **Do you nurture and cherish your wife?**

9. *Practical* – Christ not only showed his love in his sacrifice at the cross, He also loved in practical ways, beyond just words. Consider the feeding of the 5,000 and the many physical healings of Jesus. Wives have real, practical needs, and the Christ-like husband is aware of them and meets them when he can (cf. Eph. 5:29).

¹⁶We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

¹⁸**Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.**
(1 John 3:16-18)

How might it look for a believing husband to love his wife? These are only examples. These will be different for each husband as he seeks to apply the Scriptures in his marriage.

- Telling her (verbal and non-verbal)
- Appreciating her (praising qualities and what you receive from her)
- Making time for her
- Communicating (listening and not assuming you can read her mind)
- Sharing (of your life, your complete partner)
- Promoting her growth and development
- Treating her as priority (after God)
- Working with her. If she is working, then so should you.
- Serve her quickly. If she asks you to do something you can do, do it right away.

❖ **Do you seek practical ways to love your wife?**

He Lives with His Wife in an Understanding Way

Second, a husband seeking to glorify God must live with his wife in an understanding way or “with knowledge”. Believing husbands are called to be student of their wife.

⁷You husbands in the same way, **live with your wives in an understanding way**, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. (1 Pet 3:7)

This is not an easy task. Understanding your wife takes time and energy. Many believing husbands have been influenced by the world's thinking and have become lazy in this regard. Just as with every other aspect of the Christian life and walk, this needs to be done in the power of the Spirit and as a by-product of a husband walking in the Spirit.

❖ **Do you expend the energy and time needed to honor God in studying your wife?**

When a husband lives with his wife in an understanding way, often her problems and her passions become his. We are called to bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2), to rejoice with those who rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn (Rom 12:15). Husbands who seek to understand their wives will fulfill these commands from Scripture by default.

Additionally, a husband must spend time praying for his wife, and no husband can adequately pray for his wife if he is not consciously seeking to understand her.

Finally, people change as they age. The husband who thinks he has “figured out” his wife should not get comfortable. The command here is to live with one’s wife in an understanding way which conveys that this is an ongoing process rather than a one-time occasion.

This passage also speaks to the believing husband treating his wife gently, as something precious and valuable. He is also to show her honor which means esteem or respect since she is an equal with him before Christ in salvation (Gal 2:28).

How might it look for a believing husband to live with his wife in an understanding way? These are only examples. These will be different for each husband as he seeks to apply the Scriptures in his marriage.

- Purpose to spend time with her regularly
- Purpose to interact with her regarding the Scriptures
- Purpose to converse with her on a wide range of topics

❖ Do you seek practical ways to understand your wife?

He Leads Like Christ as a Servant

Finally, a husband seeking to glorify God in his marriage must be a servant-leader to his wife.

²³For **the husband is the head of the wife**, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. (Eph 5:23)

This is the most misunderstood aspect of what a godly husband’s role is. Many men will say, “I need to be a better leader in my home”, but not many understand what the Scriptures teach concerning being a leader in the home. The world’s ideas of a husband’s leadership rarely have anything to do with God’s. Few husbands really seek to lead at all, and those who do typically have a very skewed view of what that should look like.

First, let us examine what godly leadership is *not*:

1. *It is NOT a dictatorship.* In Mark 10:35-45, Jesus drew a contrast between His concept of authority and the world’s.

⁴²Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. ⁴³But it is not this way among you, **but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant;** ⁴⁴and **whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.** ⁴⁵For **even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve**, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-45)

Therefore, a godly husband should not expect his wife to serve him, and he should not lord his authority over his wife. The husband who has ever said, “You need to do this because I am your husband and you need to submit to me,” is thinking completely contrary about what it means to be a godly leader of his wife. Some husbands are even guilty of taking this to the next level and demanding that their wife not have independent thought and accept their opinions and preferences. “It is not this way among you.”

❖ Are you a dictator to your wife?

2. *It is NOT making ALL the decisions.* This point is related to the previous point, but a husband has neither the time nor the biblical responsibility to make *all* the decisions in a marriage. He needs his wife's insights and counsel with discernment many times. The unintended consequence of a husband who takes it upon himself to make all of the decisions is that he never allows his wife to think and help him in that way. Often, husbands who think they need to make all the decisions in a marriage struggle with control and do not trust God as they should.

As a side note, a wife cannot fulfill the description of the godly woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 if her husband makes all the decisions. A controlling husband is not one whose heart trusts his wife (Prov 31:11). In reality, as with so many other issues, pride is at the root of a husband's heart who thinks he needs to make all the decisions in his marriage.

❖ **Do you make all the decisions in your home or require your approval for all decisions?**

3. *It is NOT following.* This almost goes without mention, but it must be clearly stated. A godly husband cannot lead in a Christ-like way if he is following the leadership of his wife. God has established the husband as the head of the marriage, and as such he needs to fulfill that role.

³But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and **the man is the head of a woman**, and God is the head of Christ. (1 Cor 11:3)

²³For **the husband is the head of the wife**, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. (Eph 5:23)

A man cannot fulfill his role as a godly husband if he is following his wife's leadership. That is an abdication of leadership that God has established.

❖ **Are you passive and allow your wife to be in charge in your family?**

On the other hand, what *is* godly leadership?

1. *It is Christ-like.* Christ was and is the ultimate example of a Servant-leader.

- First, Christ led as a *shepherd*, not a cowboy – Cattle are driven, sheep are led. The husband who treats his wife like a cow will have big problems in his marriage. The husband who treats his wife as a sheep understands Christ's example of leadership.

²⁷**My sheep** hear my voice, and I know them, and **they follow me**; (John 10:27)

❖ **Do you shepherd your wife?**

- Second, Christ led *gently and humbly* – Christ had every right to lead in pride since He was and is God. Yet, He was humble and even died for sinners who hated Him. Husbands have absolutely no right to lead in pride, and even if they did they should not since Christ did not. It is easy to become arrogant in positions of leadership, so husbands need to fight this tendency and put on humility.

²⁸“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for **I am gentle and humble in heart**, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matt 11:28-30)

⁵Have this attitude [i.e., humility] in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but **emptied Himself**, taking the form of a **bond-servant**, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸Being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself** by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:5-8)

❖ **Are you gentle and humble with your wife or harsh and prideful?**

- Third, Christ led by *doing the will of His Father*.

³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to **do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.**” (John 4:34)

❖ **Do you spend time thinking how to accomplish God’s will in your marriage?**

- Fourth, Christ *led by example*. Many husbands try to lead by telling. However, Christ showed His disciples and was free of hypocrisy.

⁵Then He poured water into the basin, and began to **wash the disciples’ feet** and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. (John 13:5)

❖ **Are you an example for your wife?**

- Fifth, Christ led as *a servant*. “Lead as a servant” is one of the beautiful paradoxes of the Christian life. It takes practice and attention to Christ’s example for husbands to properly lead as a servant. Christian husbands are selfish. We can say this because no one is perfect, no one is without sin. Since selfishness is a sin, we need to be putting off this sin and putting on humble servanthood.

²⁵And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’ ²⁶But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and **the leader like the servant.**” (Luke 22:25-26)

❖ **Do you lead as a servant?**

2. *It is biblical and practical.* The above principles can be applied in many different ways, but here are some ways in which they may be applied.

- *Is God-oriented.* The husband leading like Christ will lead his wife towards God.

❖ **Does your leading of your wife show her Christ?**

- *Is others-oriented.* Taking into consideration the needs, input, and desires of those under you.

❖ **Does your leadership respect the needs, inputs, and desires of your wife?**

- *Solves problems Biblically.* The world’s solutions to life’s problems are ignored in wisdom and holiness by the godly husband. God’s Word needs to be sought often and joyfully.

❖ **Are the Scriptures your guide book in marriage?**

- *Instructs not as a father, but a team leader.* A husband is not a father to his wife. It can be helpful to view his role in terms of being a team leader or team captain since they should have the same goal of glorifying God.

❖ **Do you treat your wife as a child?**

- *Motivates.* A practical way the godly husband can lead is by motivating his wife. This can be done by example or by word. Considering 1 Peter 3:7 is vital in carrying this out appropriately.

❖ **Is your leadership motivating or de-motivating (from your wife’s perspective)?**

- *Manages.* 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12 lay out the qualifications for church leaders, and one of them is that they manage their household well. An effective manager provides direction and guidance to those under their authority. Many husbands throw their hands up in response to difficult children or a difficult wife as if to say, “That’s between them and God!” While that is true, the husband has the unique opportunity to purposefully guide and influence his wife in a God-ward direction.

❖ **Are you managing your household well?**

- *Views marriage as pleasant.* It can be helpful to view marriage and a man’s role as husband as a pleasant thing. It is something God has established not simply to be endured, but to be enjoyed. This is not the goal, but the byproduct of a God-honoring marriage.

⁹Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for **this is your reward in life and in your toil** in which you have labored under the sun. (Eccl 9:9)

❖ **Do you view your marriage as a pleasure?**

How might it look for a believing husband to lead his wife? These are only examples. These will be different for each husband as he seeks to apply the Scriptures in his marriage.

- Set directions and display an example regarding body of Christ involvement
- Encourage and enable her in spiritual involvement
- Ask her opinion on your personal as well as family decisions and directions
- As you make decisions, search the Scriptures together to understand what God says
- Be her cheerleader
- Be involved and engaged in the family

❖ **Do you seek practical ways to lead your wife?**

The Christ-Like Husband of a Non-Believing Wife

Some believing husbands find themselves married to unbeliever. There are several ways a Christian husband may find himself married to an unbeliever: he comes to Christ after they are married, he marries a professing believer who later denies Christ, or he was immature or rebellious when he married an unbeliever. Regardless, the Scriptures speak to this.

The Christian husband of a non-Christian wife should strive to obey the principles laid out for all husbands above. However, there are some specific instructions and some general biblical principles given to men in this situation.

1. *Remain married and therefore committed to the marriage* (1 Cor 7:12-16, 20, 24). Paul addressed this concept of spiritually mixed marriages in 1 Corinthians. His main motivation for urging believers to remain married to non-believers is to bring a sanctifying influence to the home. In short, he views the situation as an opportunity for the furtherance of the gospel.
2. *Radiate the gospel and Christ* (Matthew 28:19-20). This concept is directly tied to and flows out from the previous, but is so important it needs to be mentioned specifically. The believing husband must live the gospel. The most intimate of human relationship is a place which allows the gospel to shine in the most magnificent ways. In the spiritually mixed marriage, there is tremendous opportunity for the gospel to be spread in the clearest and most intimate manner. Believers are to make disciples “as they go” in their life, and a marriage is an excellent setting for disciple-making even though it has its unique challenges.
3. *Respect God’s work in their life and be patient* (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). As the gospel is ministered to the unbelieving wife, the believing husband must remember that it is God who causes the growth in people’s lives, and he must therefore exercise patience.
4. *Remain in fellowship with other believers* (Hebrews 10:24-25). Though the unbelieving wife may not want the believing husband to be involved in fellowship at a local church body, this is a clear command for believers to obey. This is how the parts of the body of Christ are designed to work together. A word of caution ought to be issued on this topic though because some Christian husbands may take this too far and spend every waking hour “serving the Lord.” He must not neglect his responsibility to display Christ to his unbelieving wife.

Conclusion

Worldly notions of male leadership in the marriage are either non-existent or very crooked. The way in which the Bible addresses this topic is twofold. There are direct commands regarding the husband’s role in marriage, and there are comparisons made to Christ. Through these we see that a godly husband needs to love his wife as Christ loved the church, he needs to live with his wife in an understanding way, and he needs to lead as a servant-leader.

Most marriage problems are solved as men in marriages seek to do these three things, but “fixing a marriage” is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal has been, and always should be, to glorify God. These three commands manifest themselves as husbands bring themselves under the authority of God’s Word and as they walk in the Spirit. If a man’s relationship with the Lord does not thrive, his marriage will not thrive.

The Husband's Role – Additional Study

1. In what ways do your demeanor, attitude, words, and/or actions reflect the world's concept of what it means to be a husband?

2. Evaluate how you handle the three roles of a Christ-like husband covered in the study.
 - a. Which role do you think you fulfill best in your marriage? Why? Would you wife agree?

 - b. Which role do you think you fulfill worst in your marriage? Why?

 - c. What passages from the study would be most advantageous to meditate upon in order to grow in your areas of weakness?

3. Consider how Christ loved the church by reviewing the passages mentioned above. How can you specifically reflect that same love to your wife in a practical way?
 - a. Eph 5:25-33
 - b. 1 John 4:19
 - c. Matt 9:36
 - d. Phil 2:3-5
 - e. John 15:16
 - f. Rom 5:6-8
 - g. Rom 8:37-39
 - h. Col 3:13
 - i. 1 John 3:16-18