

The Christian Family

Chapter 2: The Biblical Duties of Husbands

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In present day America it is common for Christians to complain about the state of society. People complain about this country's evil, lying politicians and the arbitrary statist laws that continue to be made in Washington. Professing believers also complain about the state of the church: modernism, feminism, hedonism, pop-psychology, gimmicks, unbiblical pietism and syncretism, etc. Because society has degenerated rapidly since the 1960s, Christians have increasingly become involved in politics and social reform. While the desire to reform both church and state is necessary and commendable, it is unlikely that believers will make notable progress in these areas without first a Christian reconstruction of the family. After all, is it not family members (in particular the fathers and mothers) who vote these wicked politicians into office; and who repeatedly choose pastors in skirts who are theologically and homiletically incompetent and perverse? Although one must recognize the reciprocal relationship between the family and the church and thus the simultaneous need for the reformation of both, one must also recognize that parents (especially fathers-the covenant head of the family) control (from a human perspective) the future.

The husband is the head of the household and the household is the nursery of both the church and the state. Husbands and fathers have an incredible responsibility. If they are not good leaders and are weak, irresponsible and incompetent then the family, church and state will suffer the consequences. As we examine the biblical teaching regarding the duties of husbands we will note that husbands are responsible to lead their wives and children. This leadership, however, is to be modeled after Christ's loving, humble leadership of the church. As Paul says in Ephesians 5:22-33, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

In order to understand the leadership responsibilities of the husband one must examine three main categories: the responsibility of leadership, the biblical methodology of leadership, and the areas of leadership.

The Responsibility of Leadership

Before one examines how husbands are to lead, one first must examine the biblical reasons for the covenant headship of the husband. The biblical evidence for the leadership of husbands over their wives and children is so clear and abundant that conservative Christians may consider this point as too obvious to merit attention. The fact that this point is now almost universally rejected by secular humanists, modernists, neo-evangelicals (and some deluded feminists within Reformed denominations), informs us that this teaching can never be neglected or taken for granted. Thus one must examine the many ways in which the Scriptures teach the authority of the husband over his own wife and children.

(1) There are many passages in the Bible that directly teach the headship of the husband. Ephesians 5:23, “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.” 1 Corinthians 11:3, “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” What does Paul mean when he says that “the husband is the head of the wife”? The word “head” (*kephal*) in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22, 4:15, 22-24; Col. 1:18; 2:10, 18-19) means “ruler,” “leader,” “the one who has authority over.” The husband is the “leader” or “the one who has authority over” his wife. Feminists have attempted to circumvent the clear meaning of these passages by arguing that *kephal* does not mean “authority over” but rather means “source.” This argument has been thoroughly refuted by conservative Bible scholars.¹

¹ For an outstanding and exhaustive refutation of the idea that *kephal* means source one should read “The Meaning of *Kephal*” by Wayne Grudem. He writes, “1. The evidence to support the claim that *kephal* can mean ‘source’ is surprisingly weak, and, in fact, unpersuasive. a. All the articles and commentaries depend on only two examples of *kephal* in ancient literature: Herodotus 4.91 and Orphic Fragments 21a, both of which come from more than four hundred years before the time of the New Testament, and both of which fail to be convincing examples: Herodotus 4.91 simply shows that *kephal* can refer to the ‘end points’ of a river—in this case, the sources of a river, but elsewhere, the mouth of a river—and since ‘end point’ is a commonly recognized and well-attested sense of *kephal*, we do not have convincing evidence that ‘source’ is the required sense here. The other text, Orphic Fragments 21a, calls Zeus the ‘head’ of all things but in a context where it is impossible to tell whether it means ‘first one, beginning’ (an acknowledged meaning for *kephal*) or ‘source’ (a meaning not otherwise attested). b. A new search of 2,336 examples of *kephal* from a wide range of ancient Greek literature produced no convincing examples where *kephal* meant ‘source.’ 2. The evidence to support the claim that *kephal* can mean ‘authority over’ is substantial. a. All the major lexicons that specialize in the New Testament period give this meaning, whereas none give the meaning ‘source.’ b. The omission of the meaning ‘authority over’ from the Liddell-Scott Lexicon is an oversight that should be corrected (but it should be noted that that lexicon does not specialize in the New Testament period). c. The search of 2,336 examples turned up forty-nine texts where *kephal* had the meaning ‘person of superior authority or rank, or ‘ruler,’ ‘ruling part’; therefore, this was an acceptable and understandable sense for *kephal* at the time of the New Testament. d. The meaning ‘authority over’ best suits many New Testament contexts.” (“The Meaning of *Kephal* [‘Head’]: A Response to Recent Studies” in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, editors, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991], 425-426.) Grudem goes on to prove that those who argue for source (or “preeminent”) must ignore or redefine: (1) The Septuagint (LXX, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) (e.g., *kephal* meaning “authority, or leader over” in the LXX are found in the following passages: Dt. 28:13, 44; Jg. 10:18; 11:8-9, 11; 2 Sam. 22:44 [LXX-2Ki.]; 1 Ki. 8:1 [LXX-3 Ki.]; Ps. 18:43 [LXX.-17]; Lam. 1:1-5; Isa. 7:8-9; 9:14-16; Jer. 31:7). Not only does the Septuagint use *kephal* to translate “head” in the sense of “leader,” or “ruler,” or “one who has authority over,” but *kephal* is not used to translate the Hebrew word *ro’sh* “source” or “beginning” in Genesis 2:10. The word *arch* is used. (2) The New Testament examples. (3) All the New Testament Lexicons. (4) The Apostolic Fathers and virtually all the Patristic evidence. (5) The examples from Plutarch (ca. 50 - ca. A.D. 150) and Josephus, etc. (See Grudem, 425-468).

The apostle Peter also speaks to this issue. He writes, “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives” (1 Pet. 3:1; cf. Eph. 5:22). The word submissive (*hypotassomenai*, a present participle used as an imperative) presupposes the leadership of the husband. In this passage (and in Eph. 5:22ff.) submission has two aspects: obedience (v. 6) and respect (v. 2). Respectful obedience is due to the husband not because of some intrinsic superiority on the part of the man but because submission is commanded by God.

The headship of the husband is also taught in the requirements for holding church office. Paul says that an elder must be “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)... Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well” (1 Tim. 3:4-5, 12). The word for rule (*proistemi*) in the secular Greek literature of Paul’s day had three basic meanings: a) To preside over in the sense of to lead, conduct, direct and govern. b) To stand, place or go before. This meaning entails leadership with the purpose of protection, representation, caring for, to help and to further. c) In Greek society it could also be used in the sense of managing, arranging, handling or executing an estate. In the New Testament the elements of leadership and caring for are preeminent. Note how Paul sets up a parallel between “ruling” and “caring for” in 1 Timothy 3:5, “if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?” (emphasis added). The word house in Scripture denotes the whole family (wife, children, servants) not just the children (cf. Gen. 17:12-13; Ex. 12 12:48; Dt. 14:26; 23:8; Josh. 8:35; 24:15; Ac. 10:2, 16:30-34, 18:8; Phil. 4:22; Col. 3:18-22, 1 Tim. 3:12, etc.).

(2) The headship of the husband is taught by the meaning of the words for husband. In both Hebrew (*ish*) and Greek (*anr*) the main word for husband is the generic word for man. One must determine the proper translation by examining the context. Other words that are used for husband are the head or leader of the household. One such word is used as a proper name of a Canaanite fertility god. It also is used as a surname to the different gods of various localities (e.g., Baal-Peor [Nu. 25:3], the master or god over Peor). The reason this word is used for husband is because the husband is regarded by God as the lord or master of the household. This word indicates that the wife is to obey or submit to her husband-her lord. 1 Peter 3:5-6, “For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” (*durion*). She obeyed Abraham in a respectful manner acknowledging his position as head of the home.

Another word for husband (*hupandros*) which is used only once in the New Testament (in Romans 7:2) means literally “under (i.e. subject to) a man.” This word means that the husband is the one above, or the one who has authority over his wife. As a Bible believing Christian one must keep in mind that these words were chosen by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the idea that these words merely reflect a patriarchal sexist culture must be rejected.

(3) The headship of the husband is taught by creation ordinance. A creation ordinance is an ethical norm that is based upon the work of God in creation. Such ordinances are based on pre-fall creational realities and are binding on the whole human race prior to the second coming of Christ. These types of ordinances explain why Paul points to Genesis 2 as proof that wives are under the authority of their husbands. He writes, “For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man” (1 Cor. 11:8-9). “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Tim. 2:12-13). Fairbairn writes, “Thus did God in the method of

creation give clear testimony to the headship of man-to his right, and also his obligation, to hold directly of God, and stand under law only to Him; while woman, being formed for his helpmate and partner, stands under law to her husband, and is called to act for God in him. And simply by inverting this relative position and calling-the helpmate assuming the place of the head or guide, and the head facilely yielding to her governance-was the happy constitution of paradise overthrown, and everything involved in disorder and evil.”² “[I]n his sovereign wisdom God made the human pair in such a manner that it is natural for him to lead, for her to follow; for him to be aggressive, for her to be receptive; for him to invent, for her to use the tools which he invents. The tendency to follow was embraced in Eve’s very soul as she came forth from the hand of her Creator.”³

In order (man first, woman second) and purpose (the woman is created as a helper suitable or corresponding to the man), Adam and Eve are archetypes of what God intended marriage to be for all marriage relationships throughout human history. “The appeal to what God does (or says) with Adam and Eve in the creation account as an indication of God’s will with reference to men and women in general is similar to the argument Jesus uses in demonstrating that God intends permanence for marriage between men and women (Mt. 19:4-6).”⁴ Because Paul appeals to Genesis 2:18-25 as a creation ordinance, feminists and irresponsible husbands cannot argue that Paul was simply reflecting the sexist notions of Hebrew, Greek or Roman society. What Paul says is based upon the constitution of things as created by God and is binding upon all cultures: past, present and future.

(4) The leadership of the husband is also taught in God’s law. The law teaches and presupposes the covenant headship of husbands and fathers. Paul says, “Your women are to be submissive, as the law also says” (1 Cor. 14:34). Although it is likely that Paul is using the word in a broad sense referring to the five books of Moses (and therefore has in mind the creation ordinance of marriage in Genesis 2:18-25) the laws of Israel clearly present the father as the leader of the home. Here are some examples: Exodus 22:16-17, “If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins.” Note, that the father has the final say regarding this matter. In Numbers 30:3-15 we read that husbands and fathers have the authority to confirm or disallow vows made by their daughters and wives as long as it is done on the day that he hears the vow. Verse 13 reads, “Every vow and every binding oath to afflict her soul, her husband may confirm it, or her husband may make it void.” Obviously this authority entails headship over the wife and children (cf. Ex. 21:1-11).

(5) The covenant headship of the husband is taught by the analogy of God’s covenant relationship to Israel and Christ’s relationship to the church. Note the following passages: Isaiah 54:5, “For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth.” Jeremiah 31:32, “My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them” (Cf. Jer. 3:20; Ho. 2:2, 7). 2 Corinthians 11:2, “For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” Ephesians 5:23, “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church.” Revelation 21:2, “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

² Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956 [1874]), 128.

³ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 143.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Why is the relationship between a husband and wife analogous to the relationship between Christ and the church? There are a number of reasons. First, both involve covenant headship. Christ is the covenant head of the church (cf. Rom. 5:12-21). Believers are saved and sanctified by virtue of their union with Him in His life, death and resurrection. Jesus, the resurrected Lord, is the first born, the head of a new redeemed humanity (Col. 1:15-18; 1 Cor. 15:20, Rom. 8:29; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:14). In the marriage relationship the husband is the covenant head of the wife. According to the Bible marriage involves a covenant before God (Pr. 2:17; Mal. 2:14). In this covenant the husband promises to lead, love, defend, protect, nurture, etc., while the wife promises obedience. This covenant is made before God in the presence of witnesses (the covenant community). As Christ is head of the church in a loving way (for her own protection and spiritual growth), the husband is to love his own wife (Eph. 5:25). No relationship on earth should better mirror the relationship of Christ to the church than that of Christian marriage.

Second, the marriage relationship (like the relationship between Christ and the church) involves a mystical union. Paul says, “So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ [Gen. 2:24] This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:28-32). “Christ loves His church because it is His body. Husbands should love their wives because they are their bodies.... The marriage union is not merely one of interests and feelings. Husbands and wives are in such a sense one, that the husband is the complement of the wife and the wife of the husband. The marriage relation is necessary to the completeness of our nature and to its full development in the present state.”⁵

Given what the Bible says about the covenant headship of Christ over the church and the covenant headship of the husband, those who intrude their feminist egalitarian presuppositions into the marriage relationship are also perverting people’s understanding of Christ’s headship. Such thinking and practice not only destroys the biblical concept of Christian marriage but also leads to feminization of the church and (in the long run) the worship of pagan female deities. This scenario has occurred in virtually all of the modernist main line denominations. After all, if church authority teaches that Christian wives do not have to obey their husbands and submit to their authority, then how can they consistently teach that the church must obey Jesus Christ and His word. Is anyone surprised that modernist denominations trample the word of God under foot?

(6) The headship of the husband is reiterated and underlined as a consequence of the fall. Genesis 3:16, “To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’” Rather than adding anything new to the creation ordinance discussed above, this passage describes the consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin in the post fall order. Before the fall, Adam was the head or leader and the marriage relationship was harmonious. Without a depraved nature, Adam was naturally a loving, humble leader while Eve was naturally submissive and happy in her role of subjection. After the fall, however, there begins to be a sinful desire of the part of the wife to usurp her husband’s authority (3:16 should be interpreted in light of 4:7).⁶

⁵ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856]), 243-244.

⁶ Some evangelical feminist apologists have used Genesis 3:16 to argue that the submission of the wife to her husband is only the result of the fall. In other words, before the fall Adam and Eve were economical equals. Adam

What was once natural and satisfying will now be difficult and often frustrating. Also, as a result of the fall man's naturally loving, humble, sacrificial leadership will be tyrannical and domineering. This sad truth means that believers are totally dependent upon God's grace in the marriage relationship. What was once easy and natural requires diligence in prayer, study and practice.

Some Biblical Implications of Covenant Headship

Before one examines how the husband is to lead, there are a number of things that merit attention regarding this headship.

(1) Note that, from cover to cover, the Bible assumes the covenant headship of the husband. In fact there are no divine imperatives ordering husbands to lead anywhere in the Bible. God's word simply says, "The husband is the head of the wife" (Eph. 5:23). The Holy Spirit describes a creational reality. What this means is that the husband is in a place of inescapable leadership. No matter what the husband does, even when he is totally irresponsible and sits in a bar getting drunk, the husband is still the leader of his family. Even when there is an empty chair at the dinner table or an empty seat on the couch during family devotions, or, when the husband allows his wife to lead and "wear the pants" in the family, that irresponsible husband is still the head of the family. While it is a bad, absentee, irresponsible leadership, it is still a form of leadership. Because the leadership of the husband and father is inescapable, no matter what the husband does he is responsible for what occurs in the home. All husbands need to face this fact. Men that seek escape through neglect, television, drugs, drunkenness, work, etc., will be held personally responsible for the negative consequences to their wives and children by God Almighty Himself.

(2) According to Scripture responsible, hands-on leadership is not optional. This means that the man who allows his wife to act as the leader of the family is in rebellion against God. There are two primary ways that men disobey God in this area. The most common form of poor leadership is when the man doesn't want to deal with the day-to-day issues and problems that arise at home. Such a man ignores his family in order to focus upon himself. The irresponsible man wants his wife to rule the household so he can watch television, go camping, sit in a bar, or be a workaholic. This type of man is very common in American society. Such men are self-centered, egotistical and (according to Proverbs) hate their own children. As noted above, a father leads in a certain manner even when he doesn't lead. Even in the so-called matriarchal ghetto culture (where men go about impregnating women and are not involved in raising their

was not the head and Eve was not in subjection to his authority. The whole purpose of this assertion is to argue that now Christ has come and set things back in order (The passage used is Galatians 3:28: "there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."), Christian husbands and wives are back to their pre-fall condition of absolute equality of roles. The problem with this argument is that whenever Paul discusses the roles of husbands and wives he always goes back to what occurred before the fall (e.g., Adam was created first [1 Tim. 2:13]; Eve originated from Adam [Gen. 2:21-22; 1 Cor. 11:8]; the woman-wife was created as a help-meet to the man-Adam [Gen. 2:18; 1 Cor. 11:9]). Paul refers to Eve's being deceived into sin in 1 Timothy 2:14 as a secondary reason why women are not permitted to have authority over men or to teach in the church. The first reason is that Adam was created first (1 Tim. 2:13). Given the clear nature of the biblical evidence that husbands have authority over their wives because of a pre-fall creation ordinance, one can only conclude that feminist apologists are either deliberately twisting Scripture to support their own agenda or are living in a self-imposed sinful cloud of self-destruction. It is rather ironic that Genesis 3:16 itself predicts such a sinful, unbiblical egalitarian method of argumentation.

children) fathers still have a life-long effect on their children by their absence. The high crime statistics and prison population are testimonies to this tragic fact.

A second example of disobedience in this area is the man who refuses to lead his family because he is afraid of confronting his domineering wife. Such a man is married to a woman who insists (either explicitly or implicitly) on ruling the household. She may be a feminist, or a spoiled brat, or self-centered, or egotistical, or used to having her own way or all of the above. She may think that she is smarter and more capable than her husband. (Indeed she may be.) The irresponsible husband in this situation when confronted regarding his lack of leadership may say that he would like to be the leader that God's word requires but he just can't control his wife. He may plead saying: "Look, if I was the biblical leader that Scripture says I ought to be, my wife would leave me. She just wouldn't stand for it. Isn't it better that I let her call the shots than end up in a divorce court?" A man with this kind of attitude and behavior is in rebellion against God. Why? Because he is placing his obedience and relationship to his wife above his obedience and relationship to God. He basically is saying, "God I refuse to obey your word because I don't want to offend my wife." When a person puts any created thing or person above God and obedience to His word he is an idolater. A husband does not have the option of refusing to lead his wife and children.

The man who submits to his rebellious wife and refuses to obey God is a terrible example to his children. He very likely will have children who rebel against God and get into all sorts of trouble. No matter what such parents may say, their actions are teaching their children that submission to lawful authority is not necessary. The daughters have a rebellious witch as their model of motherhood and the sons have a spineless, pitiful wimp as their model of fatherhood. When parents trample God's word underfoot everyday in front of their children, they destroy their own families. They also cause great harm to the church and society.

(3) Christian husbands have a moral obligation to provide a biblical picture of Christ and the church by their behavior. The marriage relationship is an analogy of Christ's relationship to the church. When a husband refuses to lead or leads in a tyrannical manner, he is setting forth a false picture of Christ to his own children and the world. The Christian husband who is irresponsible or mean and dictatorial is lying about Christ. Although a believing husband can never lead, love and serve in the sinless, perfect manner that Christ did and does, nevertheless he still must strive to as Christ-like as possible in his loving leadership over his family.

A solid Christian marriage can be a great agent of change in society. When a Christian man is a solid biblical husband and father he not only extends the dominion of Christ into the future with a godly seed but he also exhibits to the world the love of Christ. Obedient Christian families in our lawless degenerate culture stand out as islands of grace, peace and joy in a sea of chaos and decay. One of the main reasons the evangelical churches are so impotent and salt-less today is the simple fact that they are feminized. They do not recognize the importance of covenant headship and its effect on families, the church and society. When many evangelicals do recognize a problem in this area they have a tendency to resort to show-time para-church gimmicks and shallow unbiblical theology (e.g., the Promise-Keepers movement). There is a great need today for husbands to present a biblical picture of Christ to families, churches and neighbors.

(4) A husband must be a genuine biblical leader (i.e. the indicative) before he can properly obey the imperative to love his wife. Proper leadership can never be divorced from the creational imperative and biblical law. One of the greatest problems we have in the church today is an unbiblical, sentimental, Hollywood, romance-novel concept of love in the church. In the

Bible, true scriptural love is always rooted in obedience to God's law (e.g., Jn. 14:15; 1 Cor. 13:4-7). Because modern professing Christians often define love according to our pagan culture (i.e. primarily as an irrational emotional state; infatuation; feelings), they are susceptible to psychological and evangelical gimmicks. One can find professing Christian husbands who are irresponsible; who allow their wives to lead; who are in rebellion against God with an antinomian household; who know that the household is not what it should be; yet, who think that buying flowers, washing the dishes and taking the wife out to dinner will solve all the problems that arise out of a failure to lead biblically. While buying flowers, washing the dishes and taking the wife out to dinner are good, they are not a substitute for love rooted in biblical law. The modern American concept of love is like a gold ring in the snout of a filthy pig. It is the adornment of rebellion and lawlessness. Rushdoony writes, "[A]lthough Scripture repeatedly assumes and cites love as an aspect of a woman's relationship to her husband, love is not cited here by St. Paul with reference to the wife and her reaction to her husband. The primacy is given to submission by the wife, and love by the husband. The husband's love, however, is defined as service, and it is compared to the redemptive work of Christ for His Church (Eph. 5:22-29). Thus, the husband's evidence of love is his wise and loving government of his household, whereas the wife demonstrates her love in submission. In both cases, submission and authority are governed, not by the wishes of the parties involved, but by the law-word of God. Where the submission and authority are premised on God's law, the submission and authority interpenetrate. The husband submits to Christ and to all due authority, and the wife submits to her husband and thereby furthers his exercise of authority in every realm and becomes her husband's help-meet in his authority and dominion."⁷ When husbands refuse to lead biblically and wives refuse to submit, their actions reveal their true colors. They show that their lives are not founded upon God's word but on a form of relativistic humanism.

(5) A society in which the biblical leadership of the husband is rare is a society that will degrade and exploit women. In modern America we are constantly bombarded with the idea that biblical religion leads to the oppression of women; that the worst thing for women is the Scripture's teaching on the headship of the husband and the submission of the wife. The truth of the matter, however, is the exact opposite.

The alternative to covenant headship (biblically defined) is not liberty or freedom, but lawlessness, anarchy and exploitation. The husband and father, by his loving leadership, nurtures and protects his wife and children. In the post-Christian society of today where authority and submission are denied, many men and women live only to serve themselves. Relationships are no longer viewed in terms of obedience to God's law in order to serve the interests of Christ's kingdom. Instead they are viewed through the lens of hedonistic self-fulfillment. "What does this relationship do for me?" "Does this relationship make me feel good?" Although relationships still begin with warm feelings, sentimentality and talk of love, commitment and caring, the truth of the matter for many is that men exploit women and women exploit men. When men get bored with sex and strong emotions fade away, women are abandoned. It is ironic that as modern culture has turned away from the Bible, women are more and more viewed merely as sex objects that can be tossed aside for younger, more exciting partners. This attitude of narcissism has led to the disintegration of families and great suffering on the part of men, women and especially children. The abandonment of covenant headship has carried with it judgment and misery. America's only hope is to return to Christ and His infinite wisdom.

⁷ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 338.

In Europe and America marriage used to be defined in terms of biblical faith. However, today (for many) that is no longer true. Instead of a covenantal institution with a husband, wife and children under rules made by God, modern society views the family as a group of people who decide to live together for an undetermined amount of time. Today if sodomite, lesbians, adulterers and fornicators live in the same house with romance, sentimental feelings and some type of commitment to each other this group is considered a family. This societal recognition of lawless perverts as a family shows that the shift from biblical law to humanistic positive law has already (for the most part) taken place.

(6) The feminist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are the primary result not of women but of disobedient men. “While it is true that the feminist movement is represented by female spokesmen, they are really nothing more than shills, fronting for a male lie. At the foundation, feminism is the handiwork of two kinds of men-destructive, overbearing men on the one hand and wimps on the other.”⁸ Because leadership in marriage is built into the very fabric of creation it is men who set the direction of culture. When men do not lead properly, rebellious women are happy to fill the void.

When men are tyrannical, abusive or neglectful, their wives often seek fulfillment outside of the home. When one examines the various women’s (do-gooder) groups (such as the anti-slavery, temperance [in reality-the total abstinence movement], socialism, feminism or equal rights [in reality-the “women are superior to men who are oppressive jerks” movement] movements) one often will observe single or divorced women who are very lonely, or women who are married but neglected and unloved. An excellent example is Eleanor Roosevelt who became a socialist do-gooder and lesbian who neglected her own children after she discovered that her husband was having an affair and really did not love her.

(7) Because men are the covenant heads of the household they are completely responsible for all the various problems that occur in the home. This of course does not mean that the husband is guilty for the sins of the wife. However, it does mean that if there are any problems in the home it is the husband who must deal with them. For example, when arguing and fighting occurs, it is the husband’s job to learn biblical principals of communication in order to stop such behavior. This principal applies even when the wife is the instigator and is being obnoxious. The husband must deal with every contingency and problem in a biblical manner. Are there financial problems? Is the roof leaking? Is the wife breaking the Sabbath? When a husband leads in a loving biblical manner and takes responsibility for what occurs in the home needs are met, problems are solved, decisive actions are taken and serious marital problems are not given the opportunity to grow. Husbands, God has placed you in a position of inescapable leadership: you must lead and take responsibility so the whole household will grow in wisdom and grace.

The Biblical Methodology of Leadership

When it comes to the husband’s leadership of his wife and children Christianity is truly unique. Virtually all societies acknowledge some form of male headship. But the type of male leadership one finds in non-Christian cultures is usually tyrannical and oppressive. Wives are often not viewed as equal co-workers in the task of godly dominion but as property. Wives are worked and exploited like slaves so that the men can play and experience leisure. The pagan

⁸ Douglas Wilson, *Reforming Marriage* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1995), 26.

world-view produces men who are irresponsible, arbitrary, unethical, cruel, tyrannical and even violent.

Unlike paganism which enslaves women, biblical Christianity has been the greatest force of liberation, health and happiness of women the world has ever seen. Why? The first reason is that Jesus Christ sets women free from sin and its consequences by His sinless life and sacrificial death. The second reason is that God has given His people the sacred Scriptures, which frees both men and women from arbitrary and unbiblical human requirements. The third reason (which brings us to the present point of discussion) is that the husband is commanded by God to lead his wife in a loving manner. The husband's leadership is to be modeled after Christ's love of the church. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Eph. 5:25).

The Ephesians passage (5:22-33) is crucial in understanding the nature of leadership in the Christian family. Paul not only sets forth the central command that husbands are to love their wives, he also defines this love. It is the kind of love that Christ has for the church. Why does Holy Spirit focus on the need for wives to live in subjection to their husbands and for husbands to love their wives? The reason is that since the fall women have a sinful tendency to want to dominate the husband and usurp his authority, while men have a sinful tendency to lead in an unloving dictatorial manner. In this passage God directly addresses our needs. Christians who are involved in marital counseling will immediately recognize the truth and wisdom in this passage. Husbands, if you want to imitate Christ, please Him and have a happy, godly household then heed the words of Paul. Chrysostom writes, "Hast thou seen the measure of obedience? Hear also the measure of love. Wouldst thou thy wife should obey thee as the church doth Christ? Have care thyself for her, as Christ for the church; and if it should be needful that thou shouldest give thy life for her, or be cut to pieces a thousand times, or endure anything whatever, refuse it not; yea, if thou hast suffered this thou hast not done what Christ did, for thou doest this for one to whom thou wert already united, but He for her who rejected Him and hated Him...He brought her to His feet by His great care, not by threats nor fear nor any such things; so do thou conduct thyself towards thy wife."⁹

What does God mean when He says that husbands must love their wives as Christ loved the church? The only way to answer this question is to examine how Christ loves the church. Paul tells us that "He gave Himself for her" (Eph. 5:25). Jesus lived His whole life and died a sacrificial death on behalf of His people. There are many things that we can learn about biblical leadership by examining our Lord's love of the church.

(1) Christ's sacrificial giving of Himself involved humility. "Christ Jesus.... made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). The husband's leadership must not be mingled with pride or arrogance but rather must be rooted in humble service. When a husband acts arrogantly and orders his wife around as if she were a robot or a slave, he makes his wife's submission an unpleasant and difficult task. Husbands, are you practicing the humility of Jesus in your leadership?

(2) Christ's love of the church involved grace and mercy. Jesus did not love the church because it deserved His love. He loved her in spite of her deficiencies, sin and unworthiness. One of the main reasons families are breaking apart today is that husbands have adopted a selfish and

⁹ Chrysostom as quoted in T. K. Abbott, *The Epistle to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 166.

pagan concept of love that says, “I love my wife because she is young, beautiful and thin.” But when the wife grows older and gains weight she is regarded as a boring nuisance. Frequently she is cast aside like an old car.

A Christian husband must imitate Christ and be forgiving, forbearing and kind to his wife. He must not only forgive (and never ever bring up) his wife’s sinful past he also must forgive his wife in the present when she repents and seeks reconciliation. Husbands should learn to overlook the little offenses and faults and not be negative, harsh and overbearing. A believing husband who nags his wife because her figure is not what it was when she was twenty-five years old is being unreasonable and is acting like a pagan. The husband has a duty to show his wife favor and kindness. Do you tell your wife that she is beautiful? Does she know how important she is to you? Does she sense the intensity of your love? A wife that is loved in the biblical manner is truly beautiful. She knows that she is loved and adored. She has the kind of love that the world is unaware, a love that mirrors the precious Savior’s. “When a believing husband loves his wife in this fashion obedience from the side of his believing wife will be easy. Illustration from life: ‘My husband loves me so thoroughly and is so good to me that I jump at the opportunity to obey him.’ That was putting it beautifully!”¹⁰

(3) Christ’s love of the church was characterized by service. When the disciples were contemplating their own greatness and future exalted status in God’s kingdom, Jesus corrected them by setting forth the true essence of Christian leadership. “But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’” (Mt. 20:25-28; cf. Lk. 22:25-27). Jesus, who in Himself was infinitely great and had authority over all men, could have lived as a monarch with attendants and an army of servants. Yet “He who is greatest and chief among us has set us the example of the utmost love-service. No servants waited on Him. He was Master and Lord; but he washed his servants’ feet. He came not to be served, but to serve. He received nothing from others; his life was a life of giving, and the giving of a life.”¹¹

A husband who thinks that covenant headship means that he gets to order his wife and children around while he watches television or plays poker with his buddies does not understand biblical leadership. While it is true that the wife must submit to her husband in the Lord, she should be submitting to a loving humble, servant leader. The husband should take great care to manage the household and make leadership decisions for his wife’s own benefit. A loving husband always places his wife’s welfare about his own. Is the wife tired and feeling under the weather? A biblical husband asks his wife to lie on the couch and relax while he makes dinner and cleans up the mess. If feminists really understood the teaching of Scripture regarding the headship of the husband, they would have to abandon (if they were honest) the egalitarian propaganda that portrays Christian marriage as slavery to a tyrant. The feminist caricature of Christian marriage is one of the greatest lies of all time. Sadly, hypocritical professors of religion have given credence to this lie by their sinful harsh treatment of their wives. Husbands, are you giving the heathen cause to blaspheme the cause of God and truth by the dictatorial, unloving manner in which you treat your spouse?

¹⁰ William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967, 68), 250.

¹¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1987), 382-284.

(4) Christ's love of the church involved sacrifice. Not only did our Lord leave the glory of heaven behind to be born in a manger to live a life of rejection and suffering, he also paid the ultimate price by dying a sacrificial death for His bride. In imitation of Jesus, a Christian husband must often set aside his own interests for the sake of his wife. The man who spent a lot of time with his friends playing pool, camping, fishing, hunting, etc. before marriage, now spends that time with his wife and family. This point does not mean that a husband can't have friends or get involved in various male activities. It does mean, however, that the vast majority of time is focused on his family. He is there for them and lives to serve and nourish them. A man who treats his family as a side compartment of life, who puts in an appearance here and there to soothe a guilty conscience is not placing his family first. He does not love his wife as Christ loved the church. "Because Christ is the head of the church, he is its Savior; therefore, as the husband is the head of the wife, he should not only rule, but protect and bless."¹²

An implication of this passage (Eph. 5:25) is that husbands must be willing to defend their wives and even die if necessary in the process. Hodge writes, "As their relation to their wives is analogous to that of Christ to His church, it imposes the obligation to love them as he loves the church. But Christ so loved the church as to die for it. Husbands, therefore, should be willing to die for their wives. This seems to be the natural import of the passage, and it is the interpretation commonly given to it."¹³

(5) Christ's love of the church involved a perfect obedience to God's law (Heb. 4:15). It is very important that Christians understand that love (biblically defined) is never antinomian. When Scripture speaks of love it emphasizes not an emotional state but duty. Biblical love is first and foremost the treatment of others in accordance with God's holy law. Jesus says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (Jn. 14:15). Note how Paul equates love with obedience to the law. He writes, "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:8-10). "Love without law is a contradiction; while love and law are not identical, the one cannot exist without the other. If a man claims to love a woman, and then asks, in the name of a more personal and existential relationship, that they live together without marriage, the woman is justified in questioning his love. Love cannot be separated from law without denying love, nor can law be separated from love without denying law."¹⁴

Why is it so important that believers understand that love is a biblical duty, a fulfillment of the law? A major reason is that it frees Christians from the whim of their emotions. Emotions are often fickle. They can come and they can go. A man who has been married thirty years may not always experience the strong feelings towards his wife that he did when they were first engaged. When people are led along by their emotions instead of God's word their lives are characterized by lawlessness and chaos. The humanistic idea of love as a self-serving, irrational, emotional experience leads inescapably to a love of what is evil. When God commands husbands to love their wives it is rather obvious that he is not commanding them to somehow change their emotional state. Love is a duty, a way of living. This means that Christian husbands must always keep their emotions subservient to Scripture.

¹² Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856]), 229.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁴ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 432.

It also means that the biblical model of love is not something that just happens to us; that is, we are not passive creatures waiting for an experience (e.g., falling in love). The biblical pattern is lawful, responsible commitment that leads to biblical action towards one's spouse. Note that the definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13 focuses not on emotions, but on having biblical attitudes and behavior. "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (vs. 4-8). What husbands need to do is place their wives first, serve them, treat them lawfully and then (if lacking) the emotional aspect of love will inevitably follow.

When Christ commands us to love our enemies He does not mean that we are to sit around and try and develop good feelings towards them. On the contrary, He expects us to treat them lawfully and to do good unto them. By treating our enemies with kindness, (e.g., giving them something to eat or drink) we invest our time and resources in that person or persons. This type of behavior will cause a change of emotions. When you invest yourself in another, you begin a different attitude toward them. Such an attitude that develops and grows out of serving and giving is genuine and lasting.

When a husband finds himself in a marriage where good emotions and excitement are lacking, he has the responsibility to lead and act in such a manner that will rekindle proper emotions. If a husband wants his wife to have emotional love toward him, he must first love his wife biblically. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19). The covenant head is responsible for nurturing love in the household. If the home is a cold, loveless place then he must take action. He must give of himself, serve, sacrifice and admonish to remedy the situation. If the wife is cold-hearted and does not love in return the husband must not give up or try to punish his wife by reciprocating in kind. A husband's obedience to the Word must never be based on the behavior of his wife. Remember the husband is responsible for what occurs in the home. If he disobeys God and uses his wife's ungodly behavior as an excuse, he only hurts himself and the whole house. God will hold him personally responsible for his sinful behavior. Calvin writes, "Now when a husband has well considered and examined his own faults thoroughly, he will hold his peace, and patiently bear with his wife's faults, until God gives her the grace to correct them. And meanwhile, whatever happens, let him not cease to act like a husband in applying himself to his wife's interests, to win her to God. For he is not set in a position of superiority, except for the benefit and welfare of his yoke fellow."¹⁵

(6) Jesus' love of the church involves patience and forbearance. When Christ's disciples were slow to believe and were unable to understand His simple teachings, He admonished them gently. Our Lord was very patient with his thick-skulled disciples. Paul refers to this aspect of biblical love in first Corinthians: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy...does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil...bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (13:4, 5, 7).

A Christian husband should not expect the instantaneous sanctification of his wife. Sanctification is a continuous process that takes a lot of hard work (By this statement I do not intend to imply that Christ is not the author and enabler of sanctification. I am only emphasizing our responsibility in this area.). Husbands need to set both short term and long term goals. Obviously, blatantly sinful behavior must not be tolerated. However, there are areas of attitude and behavior that will take both the husband and wife time to replace with godly habits.

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Sermons on Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1973 [1577]), 574.

Husbands that are perfectionists; that expect an instantaneous entire sanctification; that have little or no patience, often become frustrated and give up. A Christian marriage should never stand still. The husband must lead the family forward in corporate sanctification. Such leadership requires planning, action and patience. If the husband keeps in mind the overall picture, that the goal of Christian marriage is the glorification of God and not serving the needs of and glorifying the husband then patience and perseverance will be much easier to maintain.

If a husband is to imitate Christ in His patience and forbearance then he must learn to think the best of his wife and not the worst. He must learn to give her the benefit of the doubt. A Christian husband must never attribute evil motives to his wife's behavior when it is not clear if her intent was innocent or malevolent. As Paul says, love "thinks no evil" "believes all things" and "is not provoked." Much useless arguing in marriage is attributable to husbands and wives that are trying to read each other's minds and read between the lines. In such situations spouses become angry and contentious over matters that may or may not even exist. Husbands and wives are sinners. If they begin to attribute evil motives or assume malevolent meanings "between the lines" then severe contention is inevitable. The husband in such situations must lead by example and admonitions; and, make sure that such unchristian, non-productive communication does not occur in the home. Believers are never to attempt to read the hearts of other believers. That is something that only God can do.

Husbands, Love Your Own Bodies

After Paul sets forth the imperative for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church he elaborates on this teaching by saying, "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church" (Eph. 5:28-29). Christian husbands who follow the example of Christ do so only by loving their wives as their own bodies. The husband should love his wife because she is his body.

The reference to loving one's wife refers to two realities. First, we are reminded of the fact that Eve was made from Adam's own body. A marriage covenant places a man and woman in such a close personal relationship that they are to be viewed as one entity and not isolated individuals. Once a man understands this fact he should realize that mistreating his wife only hurts himself. Calvin writes, "An argument is now drawn from nature itself, to prove that men ought love their wives. Every man, by his very nature, loves himself. But no man can love himself without loving his wife. Therefore, the man who does not love his wife is a monster. The minor proposition is proved in this manner. Marriage was appointed by God on the condition that the two should be one flesh; and that this unity may be more sacred, he again recommends it to our notice by the consideration of Christ and his church...Whoever considers seriously the design of marriage cannot but love his wife."¹⁶

Second, Paul points to the mystical union of all believers in Christ. Jesus is the head and we are members of His body. "There is never a moment that Christ does not tenderly watch over his body, the church. We are under his constant surveillance. His eyes are constantly upon us, from the beginning of the year even to the end of the year (cf. Dt. 11:12). Therefore, we cast all our anxiety upon him, convinced that we are his personal concern (1 Peter 5:7), the objects of his very special providence."¹⁷

¹⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 322.

¹⁷ William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: 1967-68), 255.

In verse 29 Paul elaborates on what it means to love one's body. "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church." The word "nourish" means to feed, to bring up to maturity. Its common usage refers to providing food or sustenance to the body. With Christ and the church, however, it is used in a spiritual manner to refer to our Lord's spiritual care of the church. Jesus expresses His love for us by providing us with the spiritual food we need. The Lord Himself nourishes us by His word, the sacraments and ministries of the church all effectually applied by His Spirit.

Nourish Your Wife

The husband has a biblical responsibility to nourish his wife. How then is this to occur? To what does it apply? Taking into account the etymology of the word and the context of verse 29 (especially verses 26 to 27), the husband must take care of his wife's physical and spiritual well-being. The husband must not only be the provider for the household, he must also lead in spiritual matters. He should help his wife progress in sanctification. Regarding both these areas there are a number of things to consider.

(1) A husband is to nourish his wife by providing the food, clothing and shelter that she needs for the household. A husband has a moral obligation to provide his wife with enough money to buy groceries, clothing, furnishings, transportation, etc. for the family. The husband must enable his wife to put good healthy food on the table. In 1 Timothy 5:8 Paul says, "But if anyone does not provide for his own [i.e. his near relatives], and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." In very strong language Paul says that fathers who do not provide for their own are wicked apostates. They are even worse than an unbeliever who by natural affections fulfills his responsibility upon fathers to their own immediate family. This point is highlighted by the phrase "and especially." A husband who refuses to provide for his family should (after proper procedures, Mt. 18:15ff.) be excommunicated by the church.

The law of God also teaches that husbands have to provide for their wives. In Exodus 21:10-11 in a law regulating polygamy, God says that if a man takes a second wife he is not permitted to neglect the needs of his first wife in the process. "If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights. And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money." The word translated "food" literally means meat and indicates that the wife is not to be given simply a subsistence diet but is to be given the best food that the husband can afford. The wife has a God-given right to the necessities of life. The implication of this passage is that the husband who refuses to provide for his household should be excommunicated by the church and the wife should be granted a divorce on the basis of desertion by an unbelieving husband.

Providing food, clothing and shelter involves more than simply bringing home a paycheck. It also involves the wise, responsible management of money and resources. There are professing Christian husbands who make plenty of money to run a household, but who are so irresponsible and selfish in their spending that the wife and children are poorly dressed and fed. Some husbands are very materialistic and waste thousands of dollars on cars and trucks that are not really needed. If a man is not making a lot of money he does not need to buy a new car every three years; and, he certainly does not need a fancy new SUV when a good used car will do. Some men are so self-centered that they spend so much money on their own interests (e.g., fancy cigars, European beer, clothes, guns, golf, camping equipment, eating out with buddies, etc.) that

the wife is left serving children hot dogs and white bread. Such behavior on the part of the husband is blatantly unbiblical and sinful. The wife and children are always to be placed first. The responsible management of money is necessary if the wife is going to stay at home with the children and fulfill her domestic duties. Most money problems that occur in American families today are not a result of a lack of cash, but rather are the result of spending beyond one's means. Christian husbands must avoid the poverty mentality that demands instant gratification (on a credit card if necessary) at the expense of a family's future financial gain and freedom. Responsible family leadership will bring a family out of excessive materialism and debt in order to have the time to spend raising and training children to work for Christ's kingdom. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt. 6:19-21).

(2) A husband is also biblically required to provide for his wife's sexual needs. With reference to sexual relations in marriage, Paul insists that both husbands and wives have a duty to be there for each other. He writes, "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (1 Cor. 7:3-4). The verb translated "render" is a present imperative that indicates a habitual duty. Here is a place in Scripture in which we are told that a wife has authority over her husband. When she requests sexual affection he is not to deny her. Paul says in verse 5 that the only time married couples are to abstain is for special periods of prayer. But even this period of abstinence must only be by mutual consent and must not be prolonged lest Satan tempt one or the other party to adultery.

This passage is very offensive to many in our pagan culture. Note how Paul completely refutes the feminist notion that a woman has control over her own body. Paul says that the husband has control over her body. Also, the idea that both husbands and wives cannot deny sexual relations to each other is viewed by many as slavery and not romantic spontaneity. Paul's inspired injunctions may be unacceptable to a post Christian society. However, given our fallen states, sexual desires and the manifold temptations of life in this area Paul's instruction are exactly what married people need.

Wives, are you placing your husband in a situation of temptation by your sinful refusal to fulfill your marital obligations in this area? Husbands, are you making every effort to satisfy your wife in this area? Are you picking a time convenient for her? Are you grooming yourself properly? Are you providing a friendly, emotionally pleasing setting? Are you taking your time for her sake? Placing your wife first in this area has great rewards.

Husbands also have a biblical duty to be content with their wives in the sphere of sexual intimacy. In our sex crazed culture scantily clad beautiful women are used in advertising, magazines, billboards, TV programs, movies, etc. as enticements to buy products, magazines or to watch television, movies and/or videos. Men are constantly being told by our pagan culture that women are supposed to look a certain way (e.g. Pamela Anderson). However, since very few women actually have such "perfect features and perfect figures" men are implicitly being told that what they have is defective; that they are being cheated in this area. When men allow themselves to be manipulated by our hedonistic culture they are no longer content with what God has given them and seek sexual satisfaction in sinful, unauthorized ways. The result is that sexual immorality (e.g. adultery, the use of pornography, etc.) and divorce is at epidemic proportions

among professing evangelicals. Christian husbands have a duty to be fully content with their wives. This means that husbands should avoid anything that tends to destroy sexual contentment with their wives (e.g. the Sports Illustrated swimsuit editions, inappropriate TV programs, movies or internet sites). They must learn to appreciate their own wives; to be fully satisfied with them. Husbands are to rejoice in their wives and be enraptured by them. “Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well. Should you fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be only your own, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love” (Prov. 5:15-19). The husband who is not seeking sexual satisfaction from his own wife on a regular basis is living in disobedience and is setting himself up for a great fall. If it takes romantic dinners, fancy undergarments, candles, etc., then so be it. If the husband and wife have to schedule time for intimacy when the children are asleep and the phone is off the hook, then they should do so. This is an area in which many men fall short. Remember, God says, “You shall not covet your...neighbor’s wife...nor his female servant...nor anything that is your neighbor’s” (Ex. 20:17).

(3) The husband must also feed his wife spiritually. The husband is to lead by example and by theological direction and instruction. He must lead in daily family devotions which includes Bible reading, prayer, praise and discussion. He must lead in making sure that the wife and children attend and join a truly Reformed Bible believing church, in which God is worshiped in Spirit and in truth. In talking to various professing Christian families this author is amazed at how many families attend a particular church not at the direction of the husband (who has chosen to remain passive in the matter) but at the direction of the wife. One will also be shocked by the reasons given by typical evangelicals for joining a local church: “they have a great youth group,” “the entertainment is exciting,” “The pastor is so funny,” “I like the pews, they are so soft,” “what a wonderful nursery.” The husband is to choose a church because it is faithful to the Bible and reformed standards, the pastor faithfully expository and applies the word of God, and the worship is biblical. If a family is exposed to mediocre, semi-reformed preaching and worship each week it is the husband’s fault.

If a husband is to lead his wife and family theologically he must first know and understand orthodox Reformed theology. This means that a husband has a responsibility to read and understand the Bible and good solid Reformed theological books. He must be able to discuss theology with his wife in an intelligent, knowledgeable manner and he must be there to answer her theological questions. Paul writes, “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church” (1 Cor. 14:34-35). Does Paul direct wives to go to the pastor or elders after church and ask them about doctrine? No. He directs them to their own husbands. The apostle’s concept of covenant headship assumes that husbands are the theological leaders and teachers of the family. “Note, As it is a woman’s duty to lean in subjection, it is the man’s duty to keep up his superiority, by being able to instruct her; if it be her duty to ask her husband at home, it is his concern and duty to endeavour at least to be able to answer her enquiries.”¹⁸ “Woman belongs to the domestic hearth, so that a simple question on her part would alone be an impropriety; for by putting her on a public stage, as it were, such an act would go contrary to the modesty of her

¹⁸ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, (McLean, VA.: MacDonald, n. d.), 583.

destined sphere. To be remarked is the adjective *idiotic*, their own husbands; they ought to do nothing to affect the bond of dependence which unites each of them to her husband.”¹⁹

Why is it so important for husbands to have a solid grasp of Reformed theology? One major reason is the simple truth that wives and children often follow the head of the family theologically whether the husband’s theology is good or bad. In fact, it is very common for wives to become doctrinally identical to their husbands. This following of the husband even occurs when the husband becomes a damnable heretic (e.g. Scott and Kimberly Hahn). Husbands, you have a solemn duty to instill biblical doctrine in your wives and children in such a manner so as to insure their orthodoxy, so that the covenanted Reformation will continue generation to generation.

What if a husband is a brand new believer and knows very little theology? Obviously, in such a situation the husband should be asking the elders a lot of questions. He should (with the advice of the elders and mature believers) build up a good library (e.g. concordance, dictionaries, commentaries, theology books, encyclopedias, etc.) and learn how to look things up. Calvin writes, “When he say husbands, he does not prohibit them from consulting the Prophets themselves, if necessary. For all husbands are not competent to give an answer in such a case; but, as he is reasoning here as to external polity, he reckons it sufficient to point out what is unseemly, that the Corinthians may guard against it.”²⁰

The husband is not only to lead by example, teaching and answering questions, he also is to guide his wife theologically. A good Christian husband will make sure that his wife has solid biblical-theological reading materials.²¹ If a wife likes to read novels, magazines and other fiction and fluff she should be directed to better reading materials. Although there is nothing wrong with reading good novels and magazines, a wife will do better spiritually and be more useful to the children if she studies her Bible and theology books every day. A wife does not need to be a theological expert. However, she should be grounded in Reformed theology, to guard against false doctrine and satanic assault, to answer children’s questions, to grow in grace and knowledge, and, to lead properly in the event of her husband passing away.

Cherish Your Wife

Paul instructs husbands to cherish their wives. The Greek word for “cherish” means to keep warm or to cherish with tender love. A husband is to take tender care of his wife. By the

¹⁹ Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 741.

²⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 1:469.

²¹ In order to lead theologically and provide solid Christian reading materials a husband must develop a family library. The following list of books is recommended as a starting point for such a library: Matthew Henry’s *Commentary on the Whole Bible*; Calvin’s commentaries; Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*; *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenetic Theology*; Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel*; *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*; *Christian Living in the Home*; Bruce A. Ray, *Withhold Not Correction*; Douglas Wilson, *Reforming Marriage, Standing on the Promises, Federal Husband*; The Westminster Divines, *The Confession of Faith*; *The Larger and Shorter Catechism*, etc. [Free Presbyterian Publications edition]; Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*; G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes and The Shorter Catechism for Study Classes*; R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*; Cornelius Van Til, *Defending the Faith*; Greg Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, Kenneth L. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*; Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy in the Church*, etc. There are hundreds of books that should be on this list. This list is just a beginning. (No significance should be assigned to the order of this list.)

word cherish Paul conveys the idea of caring for, looking after and guarding in a tender manner. Paul's use of this word has a number of implications for the husband's leadership.

(1) A husband is to cherish his wife by guarding and protecting her from harm whether physical or spiritual. Regarding protection from physical or spiritual harm, husbands should do many things. First, a husband must defend his wife from direct physical attacks. If there is a threat from an intruder, or robber, or stalker the husband must be willing to die to protect her. He is to do whatever it takes even if this involves taking a bullet to ensure the safety of his family.

Second, the husband should protect his wife and family by planning ahead defensively. A husband should pick a place to live that has a low crime rate. If a man wants to minister to gang members in the inner city or to headhunters in South America he should do so as a single man. A husband should also set household policies that forbid unnecessary dangerous activities on the part of the wife and children. A husband should not allow his wife to travel into dangerous parts of a city alone at night. If she needs to be in a dangerous place he should accompany her or make arrangements for her to travel in a group. If a husband can afford it, his wife should have a dependable late model car and a cell phone.

Third, men should not allow wives to go into situations of possible temptation. It does not take a spiritual genius to realize the danger of sending wives alone to co-ed health, aerobics, golf, tennis or swim clubs to mingle with single and married (but alone) non-Christian men. In a post Christian society of harlots and predatory whoremongers such a move is asking for ethical confrontation. To modern ears this admonition sounds Victorian or even medieval. However, the Scripture says to flee temptation. (1 Cor. 6:18; 2 Tim 2:22)

(2) In order to cherish your wife you must deal with her according to her nature as the weaker vessel. Peter writes, "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." (1 Pet. 3:7). A Christian husband has a continuous duty to live with his wife "according to knowledge" (the literal translation of the Greek). The husband is to study what the Bible says about women and wives in general and is to study and learn the peculiarities of his own wife. Only then will he be able to understand and deal with his wife in a biblical, knowledgeable manner. Luther writes, "You must proceed here just as with other instruments with which you labor. For example, if you wish to have a good sickle, you must not hack upon the stone with it. On this subject no rule can be laid down. God leaves the matter to each individually, to treat his wife according to knowledge, according to the circumstances of each woman. For you are to use the authority you have, not according to your own will, because you are her husband for this very purpose, that you may help her, conserve and support her, and not be her ruin. Hence none can lay down a rule for you with exact limitations; you must understand yourself how you are to proceed according to knowledge."²²

Peter says that a husband is to honor or show special regard to his wife because she is the weaker vessel and she is a co-heir of God's saving grace. (An added practical reason is that mistreating his wife will hinder his prayer life). What does Peter mean when he says that wives are the weaker vessel? He does not mean that women are morally or spiritually inferior to men for such a proposition would contradict Scripture and the immediate context. When Peter says that wives are "joint heirs of the grace of life" he is teaching that: a) they are not spiritually inferior to their husbands; b) they have the same (i.e. equal) status in Christ's kingdom. When Peter designates the woman as the weaker vessel his is referring to her natural physical and emotional differences as a woman. Women, generally speaking, are not as strong physically as

²² Martin Luther, *Commentary on Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1982), 140.

men. Also, they are different in the manner in which they deal with the various contingencies of life. They have a distinctly feminine, sensitive perspective. The husband is to take into account his wife's different make up and is to honor her weakness. When there is a problem or disagreement in the home the husband is not to exploit his wife's weakness physically or verbally (e.g., the one-two verbal punch). He is not to act as her adversary in order to show off his intellect or win an argument. Instead he is to be kind, gentle, patient and loving as he deals with his wife. As a person is much more careful in protecting the more sensitive delicate parts of the body (e.g., the eye) a husband will learn all about his wife so that he can be more sensitive and loving towards her.

Sadly, pagan men often do the exact opposite. Lenski writes, "The wife is the weaker vessel. Paganism always tends to abuse her on this account. Her rights are reduced, often greatly. Her status is lowered, often shamefully. Heavy loads are put upon her. She is made man's plaything or man's slave. The fact that she is weaker is always exploited. That is why Peter inserts the phrase regarding "knowledge." Christian knowledge will accord the wife all the consideration and the thoughtfulness which God intends for her 'as a weaker vessel' in her 'wifely' relation."²³ "Many men treat their wives as they would an old tin garbage can. 'Not so', says Peter; 'you must treat her as you would treat a fragile vase, Ming dynasty!' This call for gentleness parallels Paul's exhortation to nourish and cherish wives as their own bodies (Eph. 5:28, 29)."²⁴

When Peter refers to the fact that wives are joint heirs with their husbands in all the blessings of salvation, he is reminding husbands that husband and wife are to work together for the kingdom as a single entity, a team. Just as Paul reminded husbands that they are one body with their wives, Peter wants husbands to understand the absurdity of working at cross- purposes to each other. Husbands and wives are on the same side. Therefore attacking, arguing, insulting or hurting each other is foolish and counter-productive. Communication and behavior are to be directed to solving problems and kingdom victory, and not winning arguments. Regarding the union of husband and wife, Tertullian writes, "What a union of two believers, with one hope, one discipline, one service, one spirit, and one flesh? Together they pray, together they prostrate themselves, and together keep their fasts, teaching and exhorting one another, and sustaining one another. They are together at the church and at the Lord's supper; they are together in straits, in persecutions, and refreshments. Neither conceals anything from the other; neither avoids the other; neither is a burden to the other; freely the sick are visited, and the needy relieved; alms without torture; sacrifices without scruple; daily diligence without hindrance; no using of the sign by stealth; no hurried salutation; no silent benediction; psalms and hymns resound between the two, and they vie with each other which shall sing best to their God. Christ rejoices on hearing and beholding such things; to such persons He sends His peace. Where the two are, He is Himself; and where He is, there the Evil One is not."²⁵

(3) If a husband is to cherish his wife his behavior must flow from a proper heart attitude. Paul writes, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them" (Col. 3:19). For the apostle, bitterness is set in opposition to love. Paul says literally "be not embittered" toward your wife. Men are not to have a bitter state of mind toward their wives. The reason for this injunction

²³ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing Houses 1966), 139.

²⁴ Jay E. Adams, *Trust and Obey: A Practical Commentary on First Peter* (Greenville, SC: A Press, 1988), 101.

²⁵ Tertullian (ad Vxorem, ii.9) in John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 [1884]), 254.

is obvious. When husbands allow themselves to become bitter toward their wives their speech and behavior will reflect this attitude and will be unloving. A bitter spirit leads to a lack of consideration, anger, irritability, fault finding, unkind thoughts and words, harsh treatment and in some cases an unloving avoidance of the wife.

(4) Cherishing your wife involves saying and doing things that make her know that she is loved, needed and appreciated every day. When the wife makes a meal the husband and the children should thank her during or after dinner and tell her they liked it. A wife who is deeply involved in home-schooling and is doing a good job should be told that her work is greatly appreciated and that her work is crucial in building the kingdom of God. A husband should tell his wife that she is beautiful. He should tell her that he loves and adores her. After she has had a hard day of work the husband should do things to show his love and appreciation, even something simple like making her popcorn and giving her a foot massage. Learn to give your wife little compliments. These things are simple, but important.

Husbands can avoid bitterness by being kind, patient and forbearing. Men need to give their wives the benefit of the doubt and stop blame-shifting. If husbands are bitter it is usually because they are not doing their job. They are not leading effectively. When a husband does not deal with the day-to-day problems that arise and does not communicate effectively with his wife, he lets problems get out of hand. When problems accumulate and tempers flare the husband can become embittered toward his wife. If the husband was thinking biblically regarding his role as the leader this bitterness would not occur. Rather than dwelling on the faults of his wife and becoming upset, the biblical leader takes action. He deals with the problems through biblical communication and loving service towards his wife. Instead of feeling sorry for himself he tackles the root of his bitterness—his own incompetent and unloving leadership.

What Headship Is Not

Given the fact that the loving leadership of the husband is often misunderstood we need to consider a few errors common among evangelicals. One error is that the loving, gentle leadership spoken of by Paul means that husbands should not be strong leaders. The scriptural passages which speak of loving leadership, service, sacrifice, gentleness, etc. are sometimes twisted in such a manner that biblical leadership is turned into a passive, feminized, sentimental (“wimping out”) style of leadership.

Being a humble servant leader should not be interpreted to mean that husbands are to be effeminate leaders. Husbands must never adopt a feminine model of leadership. The husband is to be the wife’s best friend, not her best girl friend. Being a servant leader does not mean that the husband is to give in to his wife’s demands. It also does not mean simply washing dishes and taking the wife out to dinner once in a while. It still means real leadership. The husband has real God-given authority. Although the husband is a servant leader he is still responsible to issue commands and manage the household. He does not water down, feminize or abdicate his authority. Many professing Christians today confuse love and being nice with permissiveness and a lack of discipline. We must never make this mistake. Although a husband should consult with his wife over important decisions, he must make the final decision. The husband has the final say in the matter and his decision must not be questioned (unless of course it contradicts Scripture). A loving servant leader must also be a strong, decisive leader. Husbands, never confuse being a loving, humble, servant leader with permissiveness, indecisiveness, a lack of authority, “wimpiness” or giving in to your wife’s desires. Hagopian and Wilson have eloquently

rebuked evangelicalism's accommodation to feminism in their book that deals with "Promise Keepers". They write: "Whenever 'real masculinity' prances around in a skirt and blouse, it must be attacked and attacked by Christians with a warm enthusiasm. The secular doctrine of the 'sensitive male' must be criticized, wherever it appears, and soundly, with a baseball bat. Psychological and theological flimflam merchants, with all their estrogenic supplements, must be hooted off the public stage....The Promise Keepers movement is in deep tension with itself. It doesn't want a church full of sissies, but then turns around and encourages men to become a bunch of cry babies. It wants men to lead the home, but then wants them to follow the lead of their wives. Perhaps this tension is what led one astute reporter to conclude that Promise Keepers, as reflected in the typical conference, is 'both a reaction against feminism and an accommodation to it.'"²⁶

Another manner in which the leadership of the husband is abused is the man who leads his wife as if she were a brute beast. Such a man not only refuses to consult his wife when making important family decisions, he also does not permit her to exercise her God-given talents and gifts. Although a husband must know what is going on in the home and is responsible for what takes place there, he does not need to make every single decision that occurs in the home. A good leader, who has a godly wife well trained in Scripture and theology, doesn't smother his wife's gifts and abilities but encourages her to make decisions and rule within her domestic sphere. A husband manages the household and delegates important tasks to his wife. A good leader encourages and aids his wife in her gifted areas. The wife is a helpmeet, not a slave or mindless robot. A wife who is free to use her gifts will benefit the whole household. This author has observed various Anabaptist house church types who had a very stifling concept of headship. Wives in such a situation are often treated as if women are supposed to be stupid and cannot be trusted. In one of these groups women were not even permitted to speak without their husband's permission. A good leader trains and enables his wife to flourish in her God given task. The "Christian" feminist movement of the nineteenth century was in part an over reaction to the idea that women were not to be educated and improved mentally but were to remain illiterate house servants. Husbands, do not neglect or stifle your wife's abilities. Rather, help her develop them to the fullest for God's glory. Further, keep your wife intimately involved in all important decisions.

Areas of Leadership

The Bible teaches that the husband is to lead the household in every area. Paul writes, "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of

²⁶ David Hagopian and Doug Wilson, *Beyond Promises: A Biblical Challenge to Promise Keepers* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996), 60-61. "Any discussion of the appropriate standard for Christian husbands in marriage raises a very real concern with what may be called an emphasis of the Promise Keepers movement. Throughout 'Strategies for a Successful Marriage,' an assumption is made that the feminine expectations for marriage are accurate, and that the masculine expectations are not. The man must learn to conform his behavior to the expectations of his wife. In the words of E. Glenn Wagner and Dietrich Grien, 'I should find out what my wife's expectations are and then commit myself to doing everything within my power to meet them....' But a Christian man should first ask, are the expectations of my wife biblical? Why should we try to accomplish something which God has not instructed us to accomplish? If we obey God with regard to our wives, then their needs will certainly be met. But this is not necessarily the same thing as meeting their expectations. A marriage exists in order to glorify God through evangelical obedience on the part of both husband and wife. Neither spouse is to submit to the other's standards for marriage; they both are to submit to Christ's" (Ibid. 191-192).

the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (Eph. 5:23-24). Wives are to be subject to their own husbands in everything. There are no areas in which the husband is not responsible to lead and manage. The “in everything,” however, does not mean that the husband can demand anything that is contrary to Scripture (e.g. lying, theft, Sabbath violation, idol worship, etc.). Calvin writes, “Now St. Paul, in saying ‘as to the Lord’ does not mean to make men equal with God or with our Lord Jesus Christ, for that would be altogether too great an excess, but he shows that the fear and reverence that a woman ought to bear to God, and the subjection she owes to her husband are two inseparables.”²⁷

Conclusion

The headship of the husband over the wife is inescapable. Husbands, you are the leader of your family whether you like it or not. Therefore, you must be obedient to God’s word and lead in a specifically Christian manner. You are to be a loving, humble, servant leader who places the welfare (both spiritual and physical) of your wife above your own. You are to provide for your wife all the material things that are necessary for her to fulfill her responsibilities as a wife and mother. You are to be the spiritual leader of the household. This means daily family devotions, answering theological questions, choosing a truly Reformed church, praying daily for the family, guiding the education of the children, providing a Christian family library, etc. You are responsible for all the problems that occur in the home. Therefore, you must take the lead in communication and problem solving. Husbands, God has given you a great responsibility. If you are obedient and diligent in your duty as a husband and father the church and society will greatly benefit from it and most important of all God will be glorified. May God enable us by His grace and mercy to fulfill our covenant responsibilities.

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[HOME PAGE](#)

²⁷ John Calvin, *Sermons on Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1973 [1577]), 568.