

SOME THOUGHTS ON HUSBANDS' RESPONSIBILITIES

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1. Over the last two weeks we looked at God's call on wives to submit to the leadership of their husbands. It seems only fair that we spend some time looking at the flip side, God's call on husbands.

2. As we saw, God has assigned to husbands the leadership role in the family. This was his sovereign choice from creation. Thus, Paul says in Eph. 5:23, "the husband is the head of the wife as Christ also is the head of the church." In 1 Tim. 3:4-5 he says that to be an elder, a man "must manage his own family well" because "if he does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?"

3. Now I know some wives believe that the burden in this arrangement is all theirs, but that is not the case. Leadership certainly has its advantages, but it carries with it a burden of responsibility that is not always easy or pleasant to bear.

a. As proof of that fact, consider how many husbands have abdicated their leadership role. Instead of being the leader, they have chosen to withdraw from the turmoil, headaches, and decisions of everyday family life and have become a silent partner. This has become so common that it's stereotypical. How many sitcoms have you seen where the wife is trying to talk to her husband, usually at the breakfast table, and he completely ignores her while reading the paper, maybe uttering a syllable now and then?

b. This would be funny if it were not so sad and so wrong. Weldon Hardenbrook, a minister in the Orthodox Church, received the following letter from the wife of a believer (*Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 379-80):

The kids are in bed. There's nothing on TV tonight. I ask my husband if he minds if I turn the tube off. He grunts. As I walk to the set my mind is racing. Maybe, just maybe tonight we'll talk. I mean have a conversation that consists of more than my question with his mumbled one-word answer or, more accurately, no answer at all. Silence – I live in a world with continuous noise but, between him and myself, silence. Please – oh God, let him open up. I initiate (once again; for the thousandth time). My heart pounds – oh, how can I word it this time? What can I say that will open the door to just talk? I don't have to have a DEEP MEANINGFUL CONVERSATION. JUST SOMETHING!

As I open my mouth – he gets up and goes to the bedroom. The door closes behind him. The light showing under the door gives way to darkness. So does my hope. I sit alone on the couch. My heart begins to ache. I'm tired of being alone. Hey, I'm married. I have been for years. Why do I sit alone?

The sadness undergoes a change slowly – then with increased fervor I get mad. I AM MAD. . . . I am sick and tired of living in a world of passive men.

c. The situation is so bad that a couple of decades ago British psychologist Dr. Joshua Bierer described American men as a "bunch of weak-kneed, lily-livered sissies." In a previous survey in 1964, he had judged women to be at fault and declared American women to be domineering. He explained his changed viewpoint:

Before, I thought that the women wanted to rule the country. I changed that opinion. Women are compelled to take over, not fighting to take over. I thought the men who attended with their wives some seminars I spoke at would shoot me for my remarks – but instead they all agreed with me. It's still a fatherless society. The husbands are not husbands. All the women are crying out for a strong man and he's just not there. (Green, *Illustrations*, #491)

4. It seems many men want to limit their role in the family to that of provider or breadwinner. They spend so much energy battling problems at work, that when they are home they just want to be left alone. But you cannot lead and be left alone! That is just a way of saying you don't want to lead.

5. I'm no expert on leadership, but some aspects of the husband's leadership are obvious.

a. The husband must be involved in and informed about what's going on in the home.

(1) The fact the wife and mother has the direct, hands-on responsibility for the management of the children and the household (1 Tim. 5:14; Prov. 31:10-31) does not negate the husband's ultimate responsibility for that management (1 Tim. 3:4-5; Eph. 6:4). The wife's management is conducted in submission to the husband's leadership (Tit. 2: 5: "to be busy at home . . . and to be subject to their husbands"), not in place of it.

(2) This requires communication. When something in the family needs attention and energy, it certainly is tempting to say to the wife, "I don't want to hear about it," but God did not give us that option.

(3) In terms of caring for children specifically, I think George Knight's comments are wise (*Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 350-351):

It is imperative that fathers and mothers carry out this joint task in such a way that the leadership of both over the children is maintained and the headship of the father over the family is manifest. Thus neither should allow the children to play one parent off against the other in seeking to contravene the other's commands or prohibitions. The parents should resolve those questions in private away from the children; in public they should uphold each other's decisions, especially the mother upholding the headship of the father. Fathers should exercise an appropriate leadership by being careful to avoid exasperating or provoking comments or commands (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21) that not only discourage or anger their children but also provide occasion for their wives to feel the necessity of intervening and make it

more difficult for them to be subject to their husbands' leadership. Exasperating or provoking comments or commands include commands that are unjust and comments that are given in a callous or unfeeling way. All parental give-and-take before children should manifest mutual respect and communicate before the children that the husband genuinely loves and respects his wife and the wife, too, respects and desires to submit to the leadership of her husband and their father. Such an attitude can itself be the best setting for the children to learn their own necessary submission to both father and mother.

b. The husband must consult with his wife and consider her insights and advice.

(1) God has given her to you as your prime helper. She is his nonleading partner who has invested her life in this partnership. No one has a greater stake in the family, and no one has more knowledge about family affairs.

(2) It's important not only in terms of making the best decision, but also in terms of honoring your wife and helping her to fulfill her obligation to follow and support the decision.

c. The husband must make decisions and provide guidance and direction for the family. He cannot be content merely to be an informed observer. He must lead! He must address those things that impinge on the family's welfare and make the call on how to handle them. If it becomes evident that a poor decision has been made, he must accept responsibility for it and adjust course as best he can. (And it goes without saying that the Christian wife is not to gloat or revel in her husband's error.)

6. In addition to leading the family, husbands are called to love their wives. See, Eph. 5:25-33; also Col. 3:19.

a. Notice the care angle that is implicit in this love. In Eph. 5:28-29, we are commanded to love our wives "as our own bodies," and then we are reminded that we nourish and cherish our bodies.

b. You see, biblical love sacrifices for the welfare of its object. That's why Eph. 5:25 refers to Christ's love for the church having been expressed in his giving himself up for her.

c. Now where in this is there room for being selfish or uncaring toward your wife, let alone for physically or verbally abusing her? We are to be avenues of God's blessings on our wives, not sources of their frustration, discouragement, anger, or oppression.

(1) In fact, Col. 3:19 specifically says, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them." We are not to be to them as something bitter, which is how harsh overlords were described. Lohse comments, "[Husbands] are forbidden to behave in an overbearing manner or to imagine that they belong to a superior species."

(2) As an aside, I get really tired of how the world caricatures Christian marriages as being harsh and oppressive for wives. If they are that way, it is because of sin, not because of God's word.

7. Husbands are also called to pay honor to their wives. 1 Peter 3:7 says, "Husbands, likewise, live with your wives in an enlightened fashion (lit. "according to knowledge," i.e., in an understanding way or enlightened by his knowledge of what God requires of him), paying honor to the female as a weaker vessel and as co-heirs of the gracious gift of life, in order that nothing may hinder your prayers."

a. A husband pays honor to his wife in how he talks to her and about her and in the kind of priority he gives to her needs and to their relationship.

b. The female is a "weaker vessel" physically and positionally, but not mentally, morally, or spiritually. She is in a "weaker" position than her husband because God has assigned her a nonleading role in the marriage and because, at that time especially, the husband had greater social power. This physical and positional weakness makes the wife more vulnerable to mistreatment and therefore, in God's eyes, especially worthy of protection. God is the champion of the vulnerable, and he will not tolerate those who exploit them. See, e.g., Jas. 2:1-4.

c. The wife is also to be honored as a co-heir of salvation. In terms of her relationship with God, the Christian wife is in no way "weaker." That was Paul's point in Gal. 3: 26-29:

²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for as many of you as were baptized into Christ, clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.

d. And notice that this honoring of wives is so important, that failing to do so will disturb the husband's relationship with God and thus hinder his prayers. The Christian who insists on mistreating his wife cannot expect to come to God as though all was well.