



Strength of youth

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The Christian man as husband

In recent articles on what it means to be a godly man I've written about male sexuality (especially as it relates to single men) and how a godly man behaves in a dating relationship. This article addresses the next logical subject: the Christian man as husband.

Ordinarily it is the will of God for believing men that they seek a wife and get married. Obviously, this is not the case for all men, some by choice and others because God never leads them to a spouse. The fact that they are not married does not make them less of a man. Jesus was never married, and He was fully man. The apostle Paul was not married, and he exemplified biblical manhood. Taking the time to address husbands under the heading of biblical masculinity does not mean that being married is a stipulation for being a man. The church needs godly men who are singles. But the Bible makes clear that ordinarily God's way for men is that they marry and become husbands.

The church has always needed and continues to need men to be godly husbands. This is all the more urgent in our day because of the spineless, selfish husbands in the world around us. If the strength of our homes and churches are godly marriages, then the strength of our marriages are godly husbands (and wives).

This is one of the true tests of genuine, manly strength: "Do you treat women, and particularly your wife, in a proper, biblical way?"

What does the Bible require of husbands? The Reformed "Marriage Form" is helpful in setting forth the essential responsibilities. They can be easily remembered as the three L's: love, lead, and labor.

Love

The fundamental calling of a husband is to love his wife. All the other responsibilities of a husband fit under this primary duty. If a husband remembers nothing else, let him always remember this calling: just as Christ loves the church, so must the Christian husband love his wife (see Eph. 5:25, 28, 33; Col. 3:19).

What does it mean to love your wife? The world says that love is simply an emotion. It is a warm, fuzzy feeling inside. It is something that you can fall into and

also something you can fall out of. But that is not true love. Love is not a feeling, but a decision and a commitment. Love is demanded of us whether we feel it or not. Love is a decision and commitment to esteem our wife highly and consider her to be delightful and precious. It means we think this way and treat her this way even when she is undeserving of it and we do not feel like it.

The husband's love must be modeled after Christ's. Consider these five characteristics:

- First, his love must be *unconditional*. His love is not based on whether his wife first submits to him. His love is not conditioned on her abilities or attractiveness. He is called to love her unconditionally and at all times.
- Second, his love must be *tender*. He must nourish his wife: nurture her so that she grows. And he must cherish her: hold her dear and precious. He must be gentle and careful with her so that he does not destroy or break her. I Peter 3:7 says, "Likewise ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered."
- Third, his love must be *sacrificial*. His concern is not first about himself. He is not selfish and demanding. But his love means that he gives himself for his wife. He is willing to suffer and even to die to provide for and protect her.
- Fourth, his love must be *close*. He does not live independently of her. He is not gone all the time at work or with his buddies. But in love he lives with her. He is home and spends time with her. He shares his life with her so that the two are the closest of friends and companions. It has been rightly said that for a husband "love" is spelled T-I-M-E.
- Fifth, his love is *expressed*. He does not leave her to doubt his love by being cold or giving her the silent treatment. His attitude is not, "I told her at our wedding that I love her, and if anything changes she will know." He may not think, "It's not manly to express feelings." Or, "That's not my thing. I'm not good at that. It doesn't come naturally." You must express your love for her. She must never doubt but always be reminded of your

love. Show this in words, in actions, in helping around the house, in spending quality time with her.

For the one who is already a husband, love your wife as Christ loves the church! For the one who is not yet married, prepare yourself to love your future wife with the holy love of Christ!

Lead

Husbands are also called to lead their wives, as Christ is the Head of His church (see Eph. 5:23).

There are two dangers to be avoided in this regard. One danger is that the husband relinquishes his headship. He is spiritually weak and lazy. Rather than taking the lead, he forces his wife to assume this role. He is not involved in the rearing of the children, he does not lead in spiritual matters, but he dumps this all on his wife. This is gross unfaithfulness to his calling!

The second danger is that a husband abuses his position of headship by being a cruel, selfish, proud tyrant. An extreme form of this would be a husband whose attitude toward his wife is that she is his slave; he owns her and may do whatever he wants with her. She is a doormat that he walks all over. He is controlling and abusive. This too is gross unfaithfulness to his calling!

What does it mean for him to lead faithfully?

The husband's headship means that God has placed him in a position of authority and leadership towards his wife. He is the chief decision maker in the marriage. He is the primary provider of her needs. He is her protector.

A good head is like a good manager. A good manager doesn't pass the buck to others. He is responsible for everything that happens in the plant. All big decisions are made by him. He takes responsibility for problems and does not make excuses and blame others. The same is true of a good husband. He is ultimately responsible for what happens in his home. All major decisions are made by him (with input from his wife). He takes responsibility for mistakes and does not make excuses or blame others.

At the same time, a good manager does not micro-manage every job and every employee. He gives them freedom to make decisions, to give input, and to use their abilities for the betterment of the company. The same is true of a good husband. He does not micro-manage his wife. He respects her as his closest friend and helper. He respects and seeks her opinion. He gives her freedom to make decisions and to use her talents for the good of their home.

As a good head, the believing husband is the spiritual leader in the home. He takes charge of the spiritual life and sets the spiritual direction. He leads in family devotions. He makes sure that the family is in church

twice on Sunday. He sees to it that the children know their catechism. He encourages reading and Bible study and spiritual growth.

All this shows that the calling of headship means that a husband is the chief servant. We husbands must follow the example of Jesus Christ who came not to be served but to serve (see Matt. 20:20-28; Luke 22:27; John 13:1-15; Phil. 2:5-8). Our sinful natures want to think that headship means we are the boss, we can do what we want, we always get our way, our wife has to do whatever we say, and it's all for our benefit. But that is worldly, proud, selfish, and wicked. Christ calls us to a radical idea of headship as humble serving. We must give of ourselves for our wives.

The faithful husband does this with the good of his wife always in mind. A husband who is spineless and lazy does not seek the good of his wife but rather hurts her tremendously. So also a husband who is controlling and domineering does not seek the good of his wife but crushes her spirit, discourages her gifts, and hurts her deeply. A faithful husband has his wife's best interests at heart always. Everything he says and does must promote her wellbeing. His desire is to see her grow spiritually and to walk more closely with her Lord Jesus Christ.

Husband, lead your wife faithfully! And young man preparing for marriage some day, be ready to lead your future wife as Christ is the Head of the church!

Labor

A third responsibility that God places upon the believing husband is that he is called to labor to provide for his wife and family. There is much that could be said about a man's calling to work, something I hope to address in a later article, but here I want simply to emphasize that the husband has the unique calling to provide.

The "Marriage Form" addresses this calling to the husband: "And since it is God's command 'that the man shall eat his bread in the sweat of his face,' therefore you are to labor diligently and faithfully in the calling wherein God hath set you, that you may maintain your household honestly, and likewise have something to give to the poor."

The Form obviously has Genesis 3:17-19 in view. The context is God's words addressed to the woman and to the man after the fall into sin. God's chastisement upon the woman relates to the specific sphere of labor for which God created her: the sphere of the home and child-rearing. God's chastisement to the man relates to the specific sphere of labor for which God created him: the sphere of labor and provision. He must work hard by the sweat of his brow from day to day to provide for

the physical needs of the home and to be able to give to the church and the poor.

There is not space here to address the whole subject of “working mothers,” but it ought to be noted, even if briefly. A husband can be guilty of doing great harm to his wife and family by encouraging the mother of his children to work long hours outside of the home. Often the reason given is financial, although sometimes there are other reasons given (for example, a mother wants to use the higher education she received, or she thinks she cannot handle being home with the children every day deprived of adult interaction).

Husbands must recognize that the mother’s sphere of labor is the home (see I Tim. 2:15; 5:14; Tit. 2:4-5). She is not called to be the provider. Her life is to focus on and revolve around the care of her home, her husband, and her children. This does not mean that a mother may never for one hour do something unrelated to the home. This does not mean that a mother may never un-

der any circumstances work a few hours a week outside the home. But the mother must always be conscious that her home is receiving her best. Too often mothers who work long hours outside the home give their best time and energy to persons other than their husbands and children. When the home is the focus, a mother is going to give her best to her family and not the leftover crumbs. This is a difficult, yet honorable, joyful, and rewarding work! Husbands help the mothers in their work by working hard to provide for the needs of the home, so that this burden does not fall to them.

Too often the question is phrased this way: “Can we afford (financially) not to have the mother working outside the home?” The question ought to be this: “Can we afford (spiritually) not to have the mother in the home? There is too much at stake, and the influence upon our children is too great!”

Husbands, work hard for the sake of your wives, families, and churches!