

# Federal Husband

DOUGLAS WILSON

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## Prologue

Anyone who undertakes to add to the number of modern books on marriage had better have some good reason. This is particularly true if the author in question is doing it for the second time and all apparently unprovoked. One would think our interest in marriage books would be waning by this time; like the woman in the gospels, the more our doctors treat us, the worse we get.

But here is some more medicine anyway. The central theme of this book, the headship of the husband, was begun in *Reforming Marriage*, but there are at least two good reasons for bringing up the subject again.

The first is that such a subject as this admits of a great deal of development, discussion, and application. And so, as Paul wrote in another context, to write the same things is not necessarily tedious but rather safe (Phil. 3:1).

The second reason is related to the first. Federal thinking really is alien to the modern mind. We may consequently think we “have it down” because we have mastered the jargon, when all we are doing is using covenantal whitewash to cover up various kinds of covenantal ignorance or sin.

Our flesh doesn’t need encouragement to be selfish. In the name of biblical teaching, many men either walk away from their responsibilities in headship for the sake of what they call “love,” or they grossly twist what that headship should look like in the name of what they call “authority.”

But it is not enough for husbands to love their wives. They must do it as Christ did for the Church. If Christ loved the Church as her Federal Lord, then we have a responsibility to discover what that means.

## Federal Husband and Christ

### What Does *Federal* Mean?

For various reasons, some of them obvious, the word *federal* is grossly misunderstood today. But our word comes from the Latin word *foedus*, which means covenant. Thus a federal union, or confederated association, should be understood as one bound by covenant oaths and loyalties. As Christian men who understand the importance of covenants in the Bible, we should set ourselves to understand the meaning of federal marriage.

Among the many words which our century has trashed (words like *awesome* or *gay*) this word *federal* most certainly heads the list. The word makes us think of big, centralized things, things which make a collectivist's heart feel warm and cozy. We slap the word on institutions so that little old ladies will deposit their money there. Nobody names his bank *Bob's Sunshine Bank*; the name must be something which exudes solidity and bigness like *First Federal Security* does.

Because our federal government has become about as uncovenantal as can be imagined, it is not surprising that we have forgotten the original import of the word. We believe that federal means centralized, or big, and could not refer in any way to any type of covenant.

But classical Protestant theology reflects the biblical teaching on this subject—it is not too much to say that this

federal thinking is the backbone of historic Protestant orthodoxy. This brings to mind a distinction between classical Protestant theology and modern evangelical thinking: modern evangelicalism doesn't think and doesn't have a backbone. Because contemporary evangelical theology doesn't have a backbone, modern Christian men who are taught in terms of it find themselves without backbone also. And books like this one become necessary.

The Bible describes the relationship between Adam and the human race as a federal one. That is, God made a covenant with the entire human race, with Adam serving as the representative or covenant head of that race. Adam, as a covenant head, must be described as the federal head of our race. As we will see, this is why the Bible speaks of our loss of righteousness as occurring in Adam.

In the same way, our salvation was accomplished federally. Christ, the second Adam, was sent by God to be the Federal Head of a new race. His obedience was representative and was imputed to all His elect, who are identified as such by their faith. This is why Christ stands in a relationship with the Church which is described as one of headship. This headship is covenantal, which means that it is necessarily a federal headship.

This is all well and good, but how does it apply to husbands? The answer is that husbands are commanded to love their wives *as Christ loved the Church* (Eph. 5:25). By the very nature of the case, this means that husbands are told to model or exhibit a federal relationship to their wives. The command to husbands is to love their wives as Christ loved His bride.

This means that our theology of Christ's love will be determinative of how a Christian wife is loved. How a man understands ultimate covenantal loving will settle how *he* sets about covenantal loving. How he understands the thing to be imitated will determine how and what he imitates. If his theology is biblical (and thereby federal or covenantal), then his wife will be loved as Christ really did love the

Church. If the theology is either sub-federal or anti-covenantal, then a woman, when she is loved at all, will be loved sentimentally, not for very long, or in fits and starts.

In the modern Church, the central intellectual sin regarding marriage is one of theological definition. We want to assume that marriage is a permanent “roommate” arrangement between two individuals with certain sexual privileges included. But the Bible describes marriage as a covenant. The adulteress is one who forsakes the companion of her youth, the *covenant* of her God (Prov. 2:17). The men of Israel are rebuked because they abandoned their *covenantal* wives (Mal. 2:14). But we have thoughtlessly assumed that we could have biblical marriages without even knowing what a covenant marriage is.

Christian husbands do not need more exhortations from a vacuum. The marital need of the hour is that of doctrinal and theological definition—in particular, we need to understand covenants. At the heart of this covenantal relationship is the issue of responsibility. Whenever there is genuine federal headship, the head as representative *assumes responsibility* for the spiritual condition of the members of the covenant body, and the organic connection applies in both directions.

We are covenantal beings; we were created this way. Consider the mystery of how every human being is related. We are all cousins, which is to say, we are connected. Modern individualism wants to be blind to this interconnectedness and sees the imputation of Adam’s sin to us as an affront to our rights. But in rejecting this, the salvation provided by Christ’s righteousness, which is also imputed to us, is rejected as well.

Of course, husbands cannot duplicate this relation in its entirety in their relationship with their wives. Husbands are not Christ. But though we cannot duplicate it exactly, we are nonetheless commanded to imitate it and to seek to be *like* Christ in how He loved as a federal head. Because marriage is constituted as a covenantal institution and because the relation to be imitated is also covenantal, such

imitation will of necessity be federal. Because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church (Eph. 5:23), the love offered will be the love of a federal head.

Neglect of this truth is pervasive in the modern church. One of the most difficult things for modern men to understand is how they are responsible for their wives. Men come into a marriage pastoral counseling session with the assumption that “She has her problems,” and “I have mine,” and the counselor is here to help us split the difference. But the husband is responsible for *all* the problems. This is the case for no other reason than that he is the husband.

This does not mean that the wife has no personal responsibilities as an individual before God. She certainly does, just as her husband has individual responsibility. They are both private persons who stand before God. But he remains the head, and just as Christ *as the head* assumed all the responsibility for all the sins of all His people, so the husband is to assume covenant responsibility for the state of his marriage. If a husband says that he objects to this because it is not fair for him to be held responsible for the failings of another, he is really saying that he objects to the gospel. It was not “fair” for Christ to assume responsibility for our sins either. But while it may not have been fair as we define it, it was nevertheless just and merciful.

In reading these words, a husband may still be entirely unsure about what it means to “assume federal responsibility.” And given the divine pattern assigned to us for imitation, it is certain that no husband has a complete understanding of what he is called to do. That is why we had better turn to the subject.

### **Headship and Covenant**

What is a covenant? Our Bibles can be divided into two sections—the Old Testament or Old Covenant and the New Testament or New Covenant. One good indicator of the condition of the modern evangelical church can be seen in



the fact that many believers do not understand *what* this refers to. What does the word *covenant* mean exactly? We must begin with a definition of covenant, and as we come to the various passages of Scripture which instruct a husband in his duties, how the definition applies will be clear: *a covenant is a solemn bond, sovereignly administered, with attendant blessings and curses.*

Scripture teaches that God has made one basic covenant with fallen men throughout history, which we may call the Covenant of Grace. In the New Testament, we see the final scriptural name for this covenant is the New Covenant. Prior to the Fall, God had made a covenant with mankind in Adam, which we have violated through our sin. Genesis tells us that Adam sinned against God personally, but Hosea tells us that Adam also sinned against God covenantally, “But like men they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt treacherously with Me” (Hos. 6:7). The word translated *men* here is the Hebrew word for *Adam*.

After the Fall, and throughout redemptive history, God has made covenants with His people. But they are not a series of disconnected covenants, as though God kept changing His mind about how to deal with men. His covenants unfold successively, and *they cannot be understood apart from one another.* This one covenant of grace was administered throughout history.

God established a covenant with Adam and Eve after their sin: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15). We know from the New Testament that this was a messianic promise (e.g., Rom. 16:20), which means it must be understood covenantally. God established a covenant with Noah as well: “But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you” (Gen. 6:18). Peter clearly tells us that this was a type and that Christian baptism is the antitype (1 Pet. 3:18–22).

Most Christians are familiar with the covenant God made with Abraham: “And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly” (Gen. 17:2). As the New Testament tells us in many places, Abraham is the father of all who believe (Rom. 4:11). Moreover, the Bible tells us that “if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). The implications of this are profound.

The covenant with Moses did not represent a divine detour around all the other covenants—“So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them” (Exod. 2:24–25). Understanding the ramifications of this passage is crucial to a proper grasp of the teaching of the New Testament.

Our problem is caused because we misunderstand the New Testament refutations of the Pharisaical distortions of the law of Moses. They are commonly assaulted with their own (heretical) terminological distortions (i.e., with words like “law”). But the contrast in the New Testament is not between Old and New; *the contrast is between Old distorted and Old fulfilled.*

God made a covenant with David: “When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom” (2 Sam. 7:12–16). Who is the Christ? He is the Son of *David*.

All of these covenants were a prelude to the coming of the Christ. Believers should not think of separated pacts or contracts throughout history. The believer must think of a growing child, a fruitful tree, a bud unfolding into a flower. We must understand the organic continuity of the covenants. That continuity is found *in a Person* and reflects the solitary redemptive purpose of God from the beginning of history to the end of it, always expressed in a covenant. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord of the New

Covenant now (Heb. 8:6); has always been the Lord of the New Covenant (1 Cor. 10:1–13); and ministers throughout all history (Heb. 9:15).

The reason we must consider all this in a book on marriage and family is that God's dealings with His people throughout history (which are always covenantal) are set before us in the New Testament as the pattern for husbands to follow. The doctrine of male headship in marriage is set down for us in Scripture in a way which relates the whole thing to a right understanding of the divine covenantal order: "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" (1 Cor. 11:3).

The covenantal order is plain. The head of Christ is God. This does not mean that Christ is less than God in His nature or being, but it does mean that the Father exercises authority over the Son. The Son is equal to the Father with regard to His nature; theologians describe this in terms of what is called the ontological Trinity. But with regard to how the Father and Son relate to one another, the Father has all authority. Theologians describe this in terms of what is called the economical Trinity.

Within the triune God, the Father is the economic head of the Son. This means He has authority over the Son with regard to their roles. The Son is equal with the Father in nature and being but did not consider that equality something to be grasped (Phil. 2:5–8). He submitted Himself to the will of the Father, and that submission has never been seen by any orthodox Christian as an admission of substantial inferiority to the Father.

In our modern egalitarian world, submission is always seen as a form of losing or of being inferior in some way. But we fall into this error because we no longer think in a trinitarian fashion. Submission is seen as entailing inferiority because we do not understand the deity of Christ and His full submission to the Father.

Conversely, we should be able to see how well we

understand the biblical doctrine of the Trinity by how well men and women function together in marriage. A man who has his wife under his thumb is an Arian—the heresy which subordinates Christ to the Father by declaring Him to be a created being. A man who abdicates his functional authority over his wife—one who capitulates to egalitarian feminism—is a Sabellian. This is the heresy which sees no real distinctions between the persons of the Godhead, only different names.

A man’s head is Christ, and a woman’s head is man. But this headship does not necessitate inferiority. Paul teaches us that a woman is a man’s equal ontologically. Both male and female are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), and Paul emphatically declares that in Christ differences between the sexes are nonexistent.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is *neither male nor female*; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal. 3:26–29)

A man and woman living together as husband and wife live together as ontological equals. Peter requires that men live together with their wives, remembering that they are joint heirs (1 Pet. 3:7). However, in the economic realm, the husband is the head—“For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body” (Eph. 5:23). It is worth remembering at this point that our word *economic* comes from the Greek word which means household.

Now some might want to assume that we simply have covenantal headship on the brain and therefore find it everywhere in Scripture. When a man first finds a hammer, everything looks like a nail. But this teaching is not an example of a “systematic” covenant theology running amok.

As we saw, the adulteress described in Proverbs forsook the companion of her youth, the *covenant* of her God, and the men in Malachi were chastised because of how they treated their wives by *covenant*. Further, in the language of headship, the Bible assumes a covenantal headship. Indeed, in Scripture there is no other kind of headship. So marriage is clearly described in the Bible as a covenantal institution.

But much more is involved in this than just the word. We need to take a closer look at the central scriptural paradigms for headship—the headship of Adam and Christ already mentioned. The relation that exists between us and Adam is clearly a covenantal one. Because we are organically connected to him by covenant, when he sinned in the garden, we all sinned as represented in him. He sinned covenantally and presented us to God in that rebellion—“But [like Adam] they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt treacherously with Me” (Hos. 6:7). In his sin, we sinned. But the federal headship of Adam is most clearly seen in the biblical descriptions of Christ’s headship. Christ is plainly described as the Head of His people, and He is described as *being like Adam* in this regard. God in His mercy brought us out of sin the same way we were plunged into it. In the same way that the sin of the first Adam condemned us, the obedience of the second Adam rescued us. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, *who is a type of Him who was to come* (Rom. 5:14–15).

Paul makes the same point in his discussion of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians: “And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ *The last Adam* became a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). “For as in Adam all die, *even so in Christ* all shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). Putting this together, we see that both Adam and Christ are described as the representative or covenantal heads of their respective people. This is how our sins can be imputed to Christ, and how His righteousness can be imputed to us.

In Adam, this is our condemnation. In Christ, this is our glory and salvation. And, in marriage, *this is the kind of relationship which God commands husbands to imitate.*

We must also understand what this does not mean. Before authority in marriage can be understood, we must repent of all our individualism. In marriage, we do not have two separated individuals with one of them in charge of the other one. Rather, we have an organic union which is instructed not to be schizophrenic. All macho man foolishness is inconsistent with the covenantal realities described here.

A proper understanding also excludes the blame game. A husband can no more blame his wife for the state of their marriage than a thief can blame his hands. As Christ assumed responsibility for things He didn't do, so husbands should be willing to do the same for their wives.

Obviously, sins can be committed in marriage by both men and women. But all such sinning occurs in the context of a covenant and within the realm of the federal head's responsibility. The responsibility for all such sins therefore lies with the husband. A woman can and should recognize her sins before the Lord; her husband's overarching responsibility should in no way lessen her sense of personal and individual responsibility. Properly understood, it should have precisely the opposite effect. When a wife understands that her husband is responsible and knows that he assumes this responsibility willingly, she will be more responsible as an individual, not less. In the same way that Christ's federal salvation sets a man free to do right, so a husband can liberate his wife as he assumes responsibility for her.

We frequently struggle with what we think is the conflict between such federal responsibility and personal responsibility, because the individualism of our age has taught us to think of responsibility in *either/or* terms instead of *both/and*. But the federal responsibility of the husband and the responsibility of the wife are not to be understood as

separate billiard balls which cannot occupy the same place. A wife may think, “Either *he* is responsible or *I* am.” Or sometimes we seek to divide the responsibility—50/50, or 70/30. But it must always, we think, add up to 100.

This is why adversarial thinking develops in a marriage. “*You* are over there, and *I* am over here, and we each have our perspective.” But covenantal thinking provides the biblical basis for being able to say *we*.

Covenantal responsibility of this kind does not divide; rather, it multiplies and ascends. Federal thinking preserves the personhood of those involved; it does not annihilate that personhood. The assumption of covenantal responsibility by a husband does not diminish the personal responsibility of his wife for everything she does and thinks; rather, it strengthens it.

This mentality is not condemning but liberating—a husband who considers this knows exactly what he is supposed to do. This thing is hard but not impossible. It is simple to understand, which is good, because it is hard to do. A man must swallow his pride, which *is* hard to get down, and then stand up and do a very simple thing. Every doctrine lives as it is applied and no other way. The application of this doctrine is simply a question of having an obedient mind. *This is not a technique*; it is the *mind of wisdom*.

### **As Christ Loved the Church**

If this book has a central refrain, it is that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. For many Christian men this means nothing more than that Christ loved the Church “a lot” and that husbands should strive to do the same. But what it really means is that husbands should love their wives *federally*, the same way that Christ loved the Church. Given the nature of the divine love expressed on the cross, we can only *begin* to point out what this means. And when we think we are done, there will be no fewer days to talk about what we still have to learn.

First, we must recall what the Bible teaches about Christ's sacrificial love. In many ways we have trivialized our understanding of that event—tee-shirts on sale in Christian bookstores show Christ with outstretched arms saying that He loves us "this much." Here we see something happening in our midst which always happens when the theology of the cross is forgotten. When the meaning of the crucifixion is neglected, men keep their memory of the crucifixion but begin to focus on the physical aspects of it—the wounds, the flogging, the nails in His hands. The Bible is clear that Christ did suffer physically, but that was not what filled His soul with horror as He contemplated the death that was approaching Him. John tells us that Christ's heart was troubled as He considered His fate in the hands of sinful men: "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour" (Jn. 12:27).

He was appalled at the prospect of abandonment by His Father. He knew that He was to be sin on the cross for us. He was never a sinner, but He did become covenantally *sinful* and consequently came under the judgment of God—"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). This is why Christ called out in despair—"And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which is translated, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (Mk. 15:34). In the atonement, Christ was smitten by *God* and afflicted.

Apart from a federal or covenantal union of Christ with His people, none of this makes any kind of moral sense. If one man is guilty of a heinous crime, how does it comport with justice to kill someone else for that crime? If we hasten to explain that the substituted victim was entirely righteous and had never done anything wrong, this only makes it *worse*, not better.

If Christ were merely a perfect individual and we a collection of imperfect individuals, then what is declared by



us to be the gospel would actually be a moral monstrosity. Because God is good, His substitutionary death for His people must have a just ground for that substitution. Apart from genuine union with Christ, the execution of one man over here for the sins of those men over there is appalling. But the union we have with Christ is described in the Bible as the union of an Adam with His nation, a federal head with His people. The Bible knows nothing of any other kind of union of Christ with His people. This is why the cross is a display of justice and not a monstrosity. This is why God in the cross was able to be both just *and* the One who justifies (Rom. 3:26).

Now when this understanding of the cross is neglected, as it has been in our day, this does not mean that the fact of the cross is forgotten. The sentimentalism described earlier takes over, and it is uniformly drawn out by emphasizing the physical anguish of Christ on the cross. That anguish is presented in the Bible, but it is presented in the figure of speech called *synecdoche*, where a part may be presented for the whole. “Many hands make light work,” but we all know that whole people have to be attached to those hands. The word *hands* stands in for and represents those people. In the same way, we are redeemed by the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7). His blood, His wounds, represent for us *everything* He did for us on the cross—the shedding of His blood to the point of death while He hung on a tree under the curse of God. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). This *becoming a curse* is essential to understand. How might an innocent man become a curse for a guilty man? The question cannot be answered apart from covenantal union.

Now a husband is also in covenantal union with his wife. He is instructed to behave in that union with the mind of Christ. We can perhaps see how important this is if we were to attribute to Christ all the various things which husbands do. A man who is the head of his wife is preaching all day about Christ and the Church—his obedience or

disobedience will determine whether his preaching is full of lies or not, but the very nature of his relation to his wife means that he *is* preaching, like it or not.

Picture Christ murmuring against His wife to the Father, "The woman Thou gavest . . ." Imagine Christ blaming the Church, pointing an accusing finger. Try to picture Christ wishing that He were with someone else. Every situation we might come up with piles absurdity on absurdity. When a man learns this and begins to treat his wife in a manner consistent with that insight, he soon sees the difference between sentimental attachments and covenantal identity.

Christ loved His bride with an efficacious love; He loved the Church in a way which transformed her. In the same way a husband is to assume responsibility for his wife's increasing loveliness. One man marries a pretty woman and hopes, fingers crossed, that she will manage to stay that way. But a federal husband marries a beautiful woman and vows before God and witnesses that he will nourish and cherish her in such a way that she flourishes in that beauty. Christ bestowed loveliness on His Church through His love. A Christian man is called to do the same. Covenant loving bestows loveliness. Federal commitment imparts beauty.

Christ's love was also an incarnational love. The Word did not love the Church from a great distance. Rather, He took on the form of a servant and emptied Himself. Christ's love for His Church was literally *embodied* in His sacrificial life. His love was not measured by what He *felt*; it was measured by what He accomplished. Of course, what He accomplished was what He desired to do, but the Bible forbids the detachment of intentions and behavior. Love should be defined as lawful behavior from the heart. We want to separate the two, letting tight-shoed Pharisees have the lawful behavior and letting the mystical goo churches have the heart.

The love of Christ is defined in terms of what He did,

and what He did, He did with a whole heart. In the same way, husbands are to love their wives with this same kind of incarnational love. This is related to Paul's instruction to men requiring them to love their wives as their own bodies: "So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself" (Eph. 5:28).

A man does not care for his own body sporadically. As Paul puts it, no one ever hated his own flesh. Imagine a man taking his body out to a restaurant only on its birthday, and giving it a present only on its anniversary. No, a man's relationship with his body is much more . . . *ongoing*. A man deals with his own body in one way or another every minute of every day. And when a man does what Paul requires here, he loves his wife in this same ongoing, incarnational way.

As discussed earlier, Christ loved His people with a responsible love. In His loving, He took on Himself all the sins of His people. These were sins which He had not personally committed and for which we had no right to blame Him. And yet, on the basis of the covenant union, He assumed responsibility. The ground of our salvation is nothing less than Christ's assumption of that responsibility.

In the same way, a husband may not be to blame for a particular problem in his marriage. But whether he is at fault or not, he remains responsible. Christ was never to blame for anything that God held Him responsible for, and yet He assumed the responsibility for all our sins. You would think that we as husbands who *do* share so much of the blame would find it easier to assume the responsibility. But the flesh revolts, and we do not want to take an ounce of responsibility over the measure of our blame—and frequently, we want even less than that. Another way of saying this is that husbands don't want to love their wives the way the Bible tells them to.

Put simply, the husband and wife are both private persons and are each individually responsible for what they do. When the husband sins, he must confess the sin. When

the wife sins, she must confess the sin. But this individual confession does not cover the corporate aspect of marriage. The couple together are a corporate person. So in addition to being a private person, the husband is also a public person; he is vested with an office. He has an invisible husbandly robe which he wears, and in that office, he bears the responsibility for the spiritual state of the family. His name as a private person is William. Her name as a private person is Susan. His name as a public person is Smith, and, in this sense of representation and responsibility, *he is the Smiths*.

Lastly, Christ loved His people with an instructional love. Christ washed His Church with the Word, as should husbands. The Lord is not only our priest and king, He is also the prophet who instructs His people. In Paul's teaching, he requires the husband to teach his wife in the same way. He is not told to pile on the information; he is told to wash his wife with the water of the Word "that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:26).

Paul presupposes that husbands will be equipped to answer the questions of their wives, "And if they [the wives] want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home" (1 Cor. 14:35). Many contemporary women might wonder at this: "Why should I ask him? *He* doesn't know!" This is because men have neglected the charge which Scripture gives to all husbands. Men believe that they do not have to know because they believe they have no responsibilities of instruction. But as Christ cleanses the Church with the Word of God, so husbands are to do the same to their wives.

This must always be done in the context of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Whenever religious teaching is detached from the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, it always degenerates into a vapid moralism. And when husbands instruct their wives without the framework of the atonement shaping their thinking, their instruction will exhibit only a pious cast of mind with the edges of each word smudged and blurred.

More frequently, when husbands lose an understanding of the cross, they come to the point where they do not instruct their wives in the Word at all. Of course, as the head of the wife, an ignorant husband continues to teach, but the lessons have to do with how Christ is more interested in Monday Night Football than in communion with His bride.

### **Not Where They Should Be**

But how does federal headship work in messier situations? Perhaps a couple marry when both were non-Christians, and he later becomes a Christian. Perhaps he was a believer who disobediently married an unbeliever. He repents later, but he obviously remains married. Perhaps husband and wife are both professing believers, but through his abdication of godly authority, she has backslidden to the point that he simply does not know if he is capable of leading her. Most married Christian men are not in this position, but at the same time, we cannot say the problem is extremely rare.

The symptoms can of course vary. He may be distressed over her spending habits, television viewing habits, weight, rejection of his leadership, laziness in cleaning the house, lack of responsiveness to sexual advances—whatever. But however the problem is manifested, what should a husband do? Suppose for a moment that he really wants to serve God in their marriage, and she appears to be distinctly rebellious about changing any of her ways. What course should a man pursue?

First, the husband in his capacity as a private person should confess to God his own sins as an individual which have contributed to the situation. For the typical husband, such sins will be numerous and may even include the initial decision to marry her. In other words, to take an example at random, if his name is Jay, he begins by confessing Jay's sins.

Second, the husband as a “public person” should begin confessing the sinful state of his household before God,

assuming full and complete responsibility for the way things are. Remember that the husband is an individual, but he is also an officer—he is invested with the office of husband. In this status, he is not his own man; he is a public person—he represents others. The responsibilities of a public person are not the same thing as the guilt of a private person. When a wife neglects her duties, the guilt of the sin is hers. The responsibility for her negligence is her husband's.

The husband should therefore confess, on a daily basis, the sinful status of his household before God and his responsibility for it, until it changes. A “problem wife” cannot be worked on like a car that has broken down. Because of the organic and covenantal nature of marriage, the problem is never “over there, with *her*,” but rather here “with *us*.” And who is the spokesman for “us,” the spokesman for this particular household before God? The husband is, and he must learn the importance of such corporate confession. If his name is Jay Smith, he must learn to confess the Smiths' sins, and he must do so as the covenant representative of that household.

Third, when he has learned to assume full responsibility before God for the spiritual condition of the household (and not before then) and the ramifications of this lesson have settled in his marrow, the husband should then sit down and have a talk with his wife. In this talk, he must assume the complete responsibility for the way things are. The chances are that he has previously blamed her many times, both in his heart and out loud, and this is not to be a sanctimonious version of the same thing. While granting the reality of her negligence and her individual guilt before the Lord, his talk should not be accusing. After he has acknowledged his responsibility and his failures to exercise it properly, he should then make clear what his expectations are for her in the future. He should also make clear his complete unwillingness to step in to do for her what she neglected to do or to tolerate a lapse into the old way of doing things.

Fourth, his expectations for change should not be exhaustive but rather representative. He should want to address the problem in principle, not *in toto*. The purpose of this discussion is not to present a twenty-year-old list of grievances—love does not keep a record of wrongs—but rather to help her learn to do her duty and to lead her as she learns what is, for her, a difficult lesson. She can learn on a representative problem. She would be overwhelmed with a requirement that she change everywhere, all at once. If, for example, the problem is one of poor housekeeping, he should require something very simple, i.e., that the dishes be done after every meal before anything else is done.

The first time the dishes are not done, he must sit down with his wife immediately and gently remind her that this is something which has to be done. At no time may he lose his temper, badger her, call her names, etc. He must constantly remember and confess that she is not the problem, he is. By bringing this gently to her attention, he is not to be primarily pointing to her need to repent; rather, he is exhibiting the fruit of his repentance.

He does this, without rancor and without an accusative spirit, until she complies or rebels. If she complies, he must move up one step, now requiring that another of her duties be done. If she continues to rebel after patient effort, he should at some point call the elders of the church and ask them for a pastoral visit. When the government of the home has failed to such an extent and a godly and consistent attempt by the husband to restore the situation has broken down, then the involvement of the elders is fully appropriate.