

# A GODLY HOME

## INTRODUCTION TO A GODLY HOME

*by Frank and Wendy Parrish*

The most important decision you will make in life is whether you have received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. But the *second* most important decision you will make in life is who (or if) you will marry. This *second most important decision* has a lifelong impact on everything you do and everything you will become in life.

This issue of ACTS will explain what the Bible teaches about:

- God's purpose for marriage;
- The role of a husband and wife;
- The responsibilities of parents.

Some married Christian leaders mistakenly think it is more "spiritual" to spend ALL of their time and energy in the work of ministry to others -and very little with their family. **This is completely wrong!**

This behavior violates the biblical basis of marriage *and* God's expectations and standards for a Christian marriage and home. Those who put ministry *before* their family do not understand God's very clear instructions in the Bible about marriage.

Please study this magazine – and your Bible – very carefully and allow the Holy Spirit to deal with your heart and lifestyle in ministry. God has designed marriage to be a strength and blessing to you. A godly marriage will help make you a much better person and more effective minister. As you will see from this study, God places an extremely high priority on marriage and godly order in the Christian home. This is especially true for church leaders who – through their faithfulness to their family responsibilities – can set a powerful example for others.

# THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF MARRIAGE

Marriage, according to the Bible, is an institution created and ordained by God. Therefore, the instructions for how to have a godly marriage must come from God through His Word. We cannot make decisions about marriage based on our own thoughts, opinions or selfish impulses. Nor can we understand what a true, godly marriage is by using the “wisdom of this world” as seen in the customs and habits of the culture we live in.

The Bible gives us a brief look at the ideal (perfect) marriage as God originally designed it. But this ideal marriage was ruined when sin entered the world through Adam and Eve. All human relationships, including those recorded in the Bible, show the distorting and destructive effects of sin. We can see this especially in marriages.

We see around us many examples – and often tragic results – of man’s will in marriage. **But what is God’s will and heart concerning marriage?** To answer this question, we need to understand what God has revealed in His Word about marriage. This will help our own marriage – and the marriages and homes of those we lead – become all that God intends.

## A. MAN AND WOMAN: CREATED IN GOD’S IMAGE

Marriage is the first institution established by God, before the Fall and the entrance of sin into the human race. God established marriage – between one man and one woman – as the normal pattern for humanity.

God created man and woman in His image. *“Then God said, ‘Let us make man [Hebrew **adam**, meaning “human race”] in Our image, according to Our likeness: So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; **male and female** He created them”* (Gen 1:26,27). This text teaches us several important principles:

1. God designed and created the human race to have *both* male and female form.
2. Both the man and woman were created in **God’s own “image” and “likeness”**. “Image” and “likeness” do not refer to our physical form, but

rather to our spiritual, mental and moral nature. “Image” means our capacity to think; learn; experience emotions; appreciate beauty; use our imagination; make choices; love and be loved; have relationships; know what is good and right.

3. Since man and woman were both created in God’s “image” and “likeness,” they have *equal value* in God’s sight, and in God’s plan for humanity and the world. Man is not inferior to woman; woman is not inferior to man. This foundational truth is vital to understanding God’s view of marriage.

This *equality* of man and woman in their value and worth to God is seen in the authority and responsibilities God has given them to share:

- Both man and woman are to have “dominion” over the rest of God’s creation. *“Male and female He created **them**. Then God blessed **them**, and God said to **them**, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; **have dominion** over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth”* (Gen 1:27, 28). The Hebrew word for “dominion” includes the idea of stewardship; it is not cruelly “lording over”, but rather lovingly caring for and nurturing what is entrusted to you (see Genesis 2:15).
- Man and woman are to have children and raise them together;
- Man and woman are to be partners – enjoying a close, loving relationship with each other and with their Creator.

The Bible clearly teaches that God intended man and woman to have total partnership in every aspect of life.

## B. ADAM’S NEED FOR A PARTNER

In Genesis 2:18, God declares: *“It is not good that man should be alone.”* God then brings the animals to Adam, so that Adam can name them (v.19). In the Scriptures, to name something is to establish authority (*“have dominion”*) over it. Naming the animals also showed Adam that *“there was not found a helper comparable to him”* in the rest of creation (v.20).

These verses reveal important insights into the heart of God and His view of marriage. God already knew that Adam was without anyone comparable to him; thus He had already determined to create someone for him. Eve was not an accidental after-thought in God’s mind!

One might wonder why there is a delay between the creation of Adam and the creation of Eve. The fact that Adam (man) was created before Eve (woman)

does NOT make him superior to her. Animals were created before Adam (Gen 1:20-25), but that does NOT make animals superior to man.

God has a divine purpose in the timing of events. He is already intimately aware of our need, but He does at times delay meeting that need in order to fulfill His plan and purpose.

In Genesis Chapter 2, we share in Adam's suspense as he names the animals. Perhaps they came before him in pairs like they did to Noah's ark (Gen 6:19; 7:9). We can sense some of Adam's longing and hope as he names each of the animals until all have passed. Yet when he is done, he realizes there is no one comparable to him. Perhaps the reason for the divine delay is so that Adam himself would come to realize how thoroughly he needed a partner who would be "*comparable to him*". He would then receive his partner with gratitude, and appreciate the wonderful gift God had given him.

## C. EVE: ADAM'S PERFECT PARTNER

God created Eve to be the perfect partner and companion to Adam. She, like Adam, was created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:27). Having the same image and likeness allowed them to share everything together – spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. In Genesis 2:23, Adam declares Eve to be equal to him in regard to their humanity. This supports the fact that Adam and Eve – man and woman – have a similar nature, both created in the image and likeness of God.

The term used in Genesis 2:18 to describe Eve as "*a helper comparable*" to Adam is the Hebrew word *ezer*. This word means "helper", "assistant", or "a support". So Eve was "a helper matching him [Adam]".

The word *ezer* comes from the Hebrew word *azar*, which is often used to describe God's assistance to Israel or to individuals (see Psalm 10:14 as an example). The word *ezer* is also used to describe God as the **Helper** of those who trust in Him (as in Psalm 33:20).

Therefore, the word "helper" in describing Eve does not necessarily imply *inferiority* or *weakness*. The "helper" is not less than the one being helped. The very need for a helper means that ***the strength of the one being helped is not sufficient by itself.***

In 1 Peter 3:7, the Bible does use the term “*weaker vessel*” for the wife. However, this refers to her lesser *physical* strength and her vulnerability as a woman; it does *not* mean that a wife is inferior to her husband. (Remember, this verse also refers to “*giving honor to the wife*”.)

Eve was created to complement Adam. The word “**complement**” means **that which completes**; or that which must be added to make a symmetrical whole. Adam needed a helper comparable to him in order to have children, enjoy a sexual relationship, and have help with work. BUT, God intended even more than that: the **full partnership** of a man and a woman. He created marriage so that man and woman would experience the joy and strength that come from true companionship and mutual sharing and support in all of life’s responsibilities. What a loving Creator we have! He created us to be a joy and a fulfillment to one another in a loving relationship as husband and wife.

Genesis 2:21, 22 reaffirms this. God used a rib from Adam to form Eve. God did not use a bone from Adam’s head, to represent him being over her. Nor did God use a bone from Adam’s foot, to show that Eve was to be lower than him. God formed Eve using a *rib*, to clearly represent her created place *by Adam’s side* – protected under his arm and close by to stand with him and support him (see Proverbs 31:10-31; Ecclesiastes 4:9,10). God intended marriage to be a relationship of intimacy and harmony, strength and joy, support and fulfillment.

## D. SOME FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF MARRIAGE

*“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24).*

In Genesis 2:24 Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, continues to reveal to us the basic foundations of the marriage relationship. This verse shows us that marriage is more than a relationship based on convenience, or just emotional or physical attraction.

Scripture reveals three fundamental principles to us here. It is important for us to grasp these principles if we are to fully understand the marriage union in God’s created order.

### 1. *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother.”*

In a traditional translation, “leave” would suggest that the man is to physically move away from his parents and set up his household elsewhere. But the

Hebrew word in this case would more accurately be translated “forsake”. However; this would not be taken to mean that a man should no longer have relationship with his parents (see Exodus 20:12 and Leviticus 19:3).

“Forsaking” should be understood to mean “*changing one’s priorities*”. When a single man or woman live with their parents, their first obligation is to their parents. But when they marry, their first obligation changes – it is now to each other as husband and wife. This means that for the married couple, their parents are no longer free to command them or have authority over them. The husband and wife now form a complete unit. Their first responsibility is now to each other.

A married couple should **not** abandon their relationships or responsibilities to parents and other family members. However, once they are married, their *first* priority is their spouse.

## 2. “...and be joined to his wife...”.

The Hebrew word translated ‘joined’ is *dabaq*. It means to “*cling to*” or “*stick to*” one’s spouse. This gives the idea of both passion and permanence that should characterize marriage.

## PASSION

*Dabaq* is also used in Genesis 34:3 to describe the *passion* in Shechem’s love for Dinah: “*His soul clave unto [‘clung to’] Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel and spake kindly unto the damsel*” (kjv).

This same word is also used to exhort Israel to “*stick to*” the Lord: “*You shall fear the Lord your god; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast [stick to), and take oath” in His Name*” (Deut 10:20; see also 11:22).

## PERMANENCE

Unlike the rest of creation, man and woman were made in God’s image. Human beings were created for the security, fulfillment and joy that can come only from stable, life long committed relationships. Animals, by contrast, breed by instinct alone. It does not matter who the partner is. Animals may have many mates throughout their life.

Man and woman, however, were designed by God to have a *life long* marriage to *one* mate. When God instituted marriage, He intended for the marriage of a man and woman to last for a lifetime. Our human nature, as created and intended by God, needs and requires a stable long-term relationship with one spouse.

Jesus reinforces this principle of permanency in marriage in Matthew 19:6: “*What God has joined together, let not man separate*”.

God has designed marriage to be permanent. In Malachi 2:16, God declares that He “*hates divorce*” and is opposed to it. He is fully aware of the destruction that comes to the couple, the children, and the many others who are affected when a marriage is destroyed. [Note: Read the more in-depth study on divorce later in this article.]

3. “*...and they shall become one flesh ...*” The term “one flesh” has a number of important implications.

## SEXUAL UNION

Others have allowed lust and covetousness to rule them, and have turned sexuality into something that is cheap crude and selfish. They neglect to cherish this important expression of love and intimacy, and fail to reserve it only for their spouse.

Some people, in the name of religious holiness and piety, have treated human sexual expression as something that is dirty and shameful and only to be barely tolerated. But this cannot be supported from Scripture. From God’s original created order we can see that sexual expression between a husband and wife is designed by God. However, the beauty of human sexuality has become, twisted and misunderstood because of the distorting power of sin.

The God Who created us gave us a physical body, a soul (mind, will and emotions), and a spiritual nature. Our whole being – body, soul and spirit – is to become *one* with our spouse as we grow in marriage.

Our human sexual expression touches every part of our being. Becoming “one flesh” involves not only physical, but emotional and spiritual bonding and intimacy as well. This is why God intended for human sexuality to be experienced only within the safety, sanctity and permanence of the marriage union, with *one* other person.

God forbids sexual experiences outside of the marriage relationship. The Scriptures call such experiences “adultery” and “fornication” – sin! God never intended for people to have sexual experiences outside of marriage. The consequences of such experiences are very destructive to us personally and very damaging to our relationship with God. (Please read 1 Corinthians 6:15-20 for more insight.)

(Note: The importance of the sexual union in marriage is studied in more detail later in this article.)

## CHILDREN

Nowhere else do we see more clearly “two becoming one” than in the conceiving and bearing of children. Children are a direct product of the marriage relationship. They are a blend of both parents – two different people coming together to make one person. Children are a combination of both the appearance and personality of each parent.

Children are the precious fruit or “*heritage*” (Ps 127:3-5) given by God to bless the marriage union. The marriage relationship as God intended it – a man and woman being joined as “*one flesh*” for life – also provides a secure setting in which to bring forth children (Gen 1:28). They can be raised to know and love the Lord, His laws, and to relate properly to others (Deut 6:1-9).

## ONE IN SPIRIT

A husband and wife are more than marriage partners. As Christians, they are also brothers and sisters in Christ. A Christian husband and wife, as believers, are related spiritually through the blood of Jesus (Eph 2:10-18). They are both members of Christ’s Body, and part of the family of God.

Scripture gives hundreds of exhortations as to how we are to treat one another in the Body of Christ. The bond of mutual love, care and consideration goes even deeper for a husband and wife. We must give great care to our relationship with our beloved spouse, who is also our brother or sister in the Lord.

## E. THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

The same terms used to describe the relationship between husband and wife are frequently used in Scripture to describe Israel's covenant with the Lord. This is not accidental, but a purposeful use of language. This is because the marriage relationship was to reflect the relationship between God and His people Israel.

The Old Testament prophets often used marriage as an *allegory (type or picture)* of the relationship between God and His people Israel. They likened God's relationship with Israel to a faithful husband married to one wife (Isa 54:5,6; Jer 3:14; Hos 2:19,20). To turn away from a relationship with the one true God and turn instead to another (as in idol-worship) was like the sin of adultery (Jer 3:8,9; Ezek 23:37).

But God was like a faithful husband to faithless Israel (Isa 54:5; study also the Book of Hosea). God did not reject Israel even when He brought judgment upon them for their unfaithfulness. He was always calling them back to renew their "marriage covenant" with Him. What an inspiring picture of God's love and grace, and of the importance He places on covenant relationship!

The use of *covenant terms* for marriage – "forsake", "stick to" or "cling to", and "one" – reveals two powerful truths:

First, marriage in its most ideal form is an image or "type" of the kind of relationship the Church is to have with Her Bridegroom the Lord Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 5:22-32). This most important of all relationships is the ultimate fulfillment of God's covenant with His people through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Second, marriage in the Old Testament was much more than just a convenient way to further the human race through having offspring. Rather, the union of a man and woman in marriage is the *first institution established by God* and should therefore be regarded as a holy relationship.

Marriage is a *sacred covenant relationship* between a man and woman.

Marriage is sacred and holy in the eyes of God (Matt 19:6). It is a long-term commitment that requires personal sacrifice and the full involvement of each spouse. Therefore, marriage should not be entered into lightly or with only selfish desires in mind.

The covenant of marriage is a sacred, life-long agreement between one man and one woman. Once this agreement is entered into, it remains in effect at all

times. It is to be adhered to even when it is inconvenient, difficult or seemingly unfulfilling. The marriage covenant is a *sacred binding agreement* for life. There are great blessings for upholding the marriage vows and cherishing your spouse – and sad and serious consequences for breaking those covenant vows.

## MARRIAGE AFTER THE FALL

Both the Old and New Testaments reveal the damage caused by Adam's willful choice to rebel against God's commands (Gen 2:15-17; Genesis 3). The fall from innocence of Adam and Eve, and the entry of sin into God's creation, has had a disastrous effect upon:

- the created universe (Rom 8:20-22)
- all plant life (Gen 3:17-19)
- all animal life (Isa 65:25)

### A. DISTORTION OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

At the Fall, Adam and Eve lost their sinless harmony of relationship with God (Gen 3:8-10). Adam and Eve's relationship with each other also began to deteriorate as Adam blamed and accused his wife for his own choice to disobey (Gen 3:12). They entered into a life of separation from, and struggle with, the rest of God's creation (Gen 3:17- 19, 23, 24).

Because of this *distorting* effect of sin on all human relationships, God had to take drastic measures to reorder the lives of now-fallen human beings (Gen 3:16-19).

To the woman God says that her pains in pregnancy would be greatly increased (v.16a). Remember that the woman was created to be man's helpmate and the joyful mother of children (Gen 1:27,28; 2:18,23,24). But after the Fall, having a large family with many children was going to become more difficult.

Next God says to the woman, "*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you*" (v.16b). Though there is some difficulty in correctly

translating the original Hebrew in this verse, the best interpretation is as follows: “Desire” in Genesis 3:16 is not sexual desire; rather, it reflects the presence of sin distorting what God had created woman to be.

As discussed previously, God had made woman as a “*helper*” to man (2:18), to rule *with* him in daily life (1:27,28). Sin, however, allowed the entrance of wrong desires. A woman’s fleshly desire would now be to seek independence from the man – even to possibly desire to rule *over* him.

In order to better understand this, let us examine the same Hebrew word for “desire” as it is used in Genesis 4:7. In this instance, God is explaining to Cain the power of sin and that sin’s “*desire is for you*”. God then tells Cain, “*but you should rule over it*” (4:7). Sin would desire to rule and control Cain, but God tells Cain to instead rule over sin (which, sadly, he does not do).

In Genesis 3:16, God tells Eve that Adam will “rule over” her. God is not, however, commanding Adam to dominate Eve; rather, He is describing a change produced by the distorting power of sin in human hearts and human society. God’s original created order had now been drastically changed.

Because of sin, woman would now desire to rule in the place of authority. Man would have to strive to resist this attempt, and was to “*rule over*” the woman.

The full effects of sin’s distortion are clearly seen in Scripture and in the world around us even to this day. The Bible account of Jezebel shows the extreme results of a woman giving in to the desire to dominate (1 Ki 16, 18, 19, 21; 2 Ki 9). There was much heartache and destruction caused by sin that was out of control in Jezebel’s life. To this day, there are women who desire to dominate and control their husbands, their relationships and their circumstances. Their families and many others suffer from this destructive behavior.

In this same Biblical account, the story of Jezebel’s husband Ahab shows the results of a man giving up his God-given responsibilities (1 Ki 21:1-16, 23-26).

The abandoning of his role also had tragic consequences. Even to this day, men who give in to human and fleshly tendencies react to responsibility by “letting someone else take it”. A man may not lead his family properly, or may not work to provide for his spouse and children. He may want to blame his wife or his circumstances for his own failures. He may even try to cruelly dominate and control his wife. In some cultures, women are treated as

animals or as possessions to be traded or sold. This is the tragic result of sin having its way in a person's life.

All of this is quite different from God's original intent at Creation. Man and woman were made to **complement** one another and **co-rule together**. Adam had been given a certain amount of authority over Eve as he was created first and named her twice (Gen 2:21-23; 3:20). However, it was not an authority to **dominate** her, but rather to be a **servant/leader** to her. God gave Adam the **responsibility** to love and cherish Eve, to protect her, to provide for her, and to lead her and their family. And God gave Eve the responsibility of supporting and helping Adam in all of his God-given responsibilities.

The relationship God originally intended for man and woman was not threatening or difficult for them. They both understood that God designed the marriage relationship for their mutual blessing. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve walked in the beauty and simplicity of a God-ordered marriage. Man lovingly cared for his wife, and she graciously received his care and gave her support back to him ruled together, loving and supporting one another.

However, the entrance of sin allowed for the entrance of distorted desires. Man and woman would now have to struggle with the consequences of sin, which included competition, striving, selfishness, dominance and rebellion (among other things). Their natural, human tendencies would now be different than what God had originally intended for them. Woman would desire to dominate or control; man would desire to abandon his place of leadership – or would strive in his own strength to regain his place of leadership by dominating his wife or behaving cruelly toward her.

Things would now be much more difficult for men and women. Even after the entrance of sin, God reminded Adam that he still had the responsibility to provide for his family, but that it would be through hard labor (Gen 3:17-19; 1 Tim 5:8). Man's shortened life would be marked by labor and toil, woman's by pain in childbirth; and they would both suffer the painful distortions caused by the entrance of sin into the husband/wife relationship.

## **CHRIST'S REDEMPITIVE WORK**

The tragic effects of sin on the marriage relationship are still very evident today. One might be tempted to feel discouraged and hopeless about the possibilities in marriage.

But we have the “good news” of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to encourage us!

**Christ’s death broke the power of sin and the curse upon mankind** (Rom 5:12-21). Christ came, died as a sacrifice, and rose again to restore people to a personal relationship with God (Col 1:19-23). Full relationship with God had not been possible since sin’s entrance into the human race at the Fall. All of mankind lay under the curse of sin (which is death and separation from God) until Christ came to set the captives free (John 8:34-36; Heb 2:10-18).

Before receiving Christ, we are spiritually “dead” in our trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-3). But when we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, our spirit becomes alive (Eph 2:4-10). The spiritual blinders that covered our eyes and kept us from seeing God and His ways are now removed. We can live very differently than we did before receiving Christ.

Christ’s redeeming work made it possible for our minds and hearts to be transformed and renewed (Rom 12:1, 2; Eph 4:22-24). We can repent of our sins, be forgiven, and be restored little by little into the kind of people God originally intended men and women to be (2 Cor 3:18).

The Scriptures tell us that we, as Christians, now have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). His will and His ways can now enter our thoughts, and we can understand what God wants *us* to do. We are a “*new creation*” and the “*former things are passed away*” (2 Cor 5:17). What we once were before Christ -and how we once thought – can now be completely different.

As Christians, we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us. *We* now have His power to help us deny our sinful and selfish desires; we are no longer slaves to sin, but free to live according to God’s original design. We can choose not to take offense, but be understanding and quick to forgive. What a difference Jesus Christ and His Spirit can make in our marriage!

As a man and woman submit themselves to God’s transforming and renewing work by the power of the Holy Spirit, they are changed from the inside out. As they are returned more and more into the image of God, their marriage will also become more of what God intended marriage to be at Creation.

Jesus came to restore what had been lost through sin. Jesus’ work was one of *restoration* and *redemption*. We have a great hope that no matter what has happened in our past, it can be healed, redeemed and restored. We can be free of the bondage that results from sinful and destructive behavior.

Many New Testament scriptures encourage redeemed believers in Jesus Christ about what is *now possible* in relationships with others, and especially in marriage. We can love each other as Christ loves us (1 Cor 13; 1 John 4:7-11). We can be patient, kind and gentle (Gal 5:22, 23). It may take time and hard work to deny our fleshly desires and become more Christ like; but it is well worth the effort, since we can then enjoy good and godly relationships with our spouse and others.

## B. GOD'S STANDARDS DO NOT CHANGE

Sin may have distorted the standards *men and women* have for marriage. But *God's standards* for marriage have NOT changed.

Genesis 1:27, 28 and 2:18, 21-24 show us what God intended the marriage relationship to be. Other Bible passages, however, show how sinful human beings have distorted the marriage relationship.

### 1. Polygamy -Having More Than One Wife

This marriage practice was first seen in Genesis 4:19. Beginning with Lamech, sinful humanity's decline from God's created order can be clearly seen in marriage.

God intended the marriage relationship to be a vital union between **one** man and **one** woman (Gen 2:24; see also Matthew 19:5; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6).

Scripture reveals that polygamy (multiple wives) was practiced by the Patriarchs (Gen 29:21-30) and by many of Israel's kings (1 Sam 25:43; 27:3; 30:5-18; 2 Sam 2:2; 5:13; 12:11; 19:5; 1 Ki 11:1-11). This was against the commands of God's law (Deut 17:17). This practice continued in Israel even in the time of Christ.

It is important to remember that polygamy (taking multiple wives) is never sanctioned by Scripture. God's original design – for one man and one woman to be joined in the sacred covenant of marriage for a lifetime -is still His ideal.

This is certainly in accord with the Creation account. We also see this in the writings of the Old Testament prophets, who likened God's relationship with Israel to a faithful husband married to one wife (Isa 54:5,6; Jer 3:14; Hos 2:19, 20).

The New Testament never sanctions having more than one wife. In fact, one of the requirements for leadership in the New Testament Church is that a man must be *“blameless, the husband of one wife”* (1 Tim 3:2).

## 2. Solving The Problem Of Polygamy

Today, polygamy is still practiced in many places; perhaps even in your church there are those who have multiple wives. Since God’s original ideal at Creation was for one man to be married to one woman – and since this is still the pattern for New Testament believers – what can you do to counsel those who have multiple wives?

They certainly should not be condemned or removed from your church. They most likely acquired multiple wives before they became Christians.

However, no man who is a committed disciple of Jesus Christ should be attempting to have more than one wife. But if a man already has more than one wife, what should he do? Should he divorce or send away all but one wife? What about the children? What does Scripture recommend?

The problem of polygamy in the Church is a difficult one. But there are principles we can learn from Scripture that will guide us as we sensitively and obediently follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

First, James 1:5 tells us that *“if any of you lacks wisdom; let him ask of God, Who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”*

With this Spirit-given wisdom, let us look at some scriptures together. 1 Timothy 5:8 reads, *“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”* This clearly shows that it would be a violation of Scripture to not provide for all wives. Even though having multiple wives is not what God intended, the husband is still responsible for the women he married and the children they produced. Those women have surrendered their independence by marrying that man, and their children are his responsibility as well.

Scripture does not forbid a man who has multiple wives, or any of his wives, from participating in church meetings. Scripture does, however, forbid a man who has multiple wives from becoming a leader or elder in the church (1Tim 3:2).

### 3. Divorce In The Bible

God hates divorce. *“For the Lord God of Israel says that **He hates divorce**, for it covers one’s garments with violence,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously”* (Mal 2:16).

It is essential to remember that, whether or not you were a Christian when you got married, marriage is a *sacred covenant* to God. It is a lifelong joining of two people into *“one flesh”* (Gen 2:24). This means that each partner – both husband and wife – must maintain, promote, support and preserve the commitment of marriage as a lifelong relationship. This is how God designed marriage to be.

To initiate divorce is to do violence to God’s order for the marriage covenant (Mal 2:16).

Because marriage is a covenant relationship established by God, He makes available all the ***love, wisdom and power of a covenant keeping God!*** He is committed to help keep and protect marriage. God established marriage, and He stands behind marriage with all of His power and authority. Marriage can be weakened and hurt ***only*** when we ***ourselves*** allow lust, covetousness, neglect, “busy”ness, anger, selfishness, pride or other sin to interfere in our relationship.

Jesus Himself also stresses the sanctity of the covenant of marriage. Jesus reinforces God’s ideal of a lifelong and unbroken relationship between husband and wife (Matt 19:4-6).

Why does God so strongly oppose divorce? It is for the same reasons God opposes any sin. First, sin is a violation of God’s moral order as revealed in His Word, the Bible. Sin is a direct rebellion against the expressed will of God.

Therefore, any sin committed -no matter how well justified or rationalized -is first and foremost against the holy Person of God Himself.

Second, sin is ***severely destructive*** to the person who participates in it! This can be clearly seen in the case of divorce. Much brokenness and pain occurs in the sinful behavior that leads to divorce. Both the husband and wife suffer from hurtful words and selfish actions. This is the result of tearing something apart that has been welded together – both pieces are badly damaged. In

addition, the children of the divorced couple also suffer, and can be emotionally damaged and hurt.

God hates divorce not just because it is wrong. He hates divorce also because of the sin, brokenness and pain that cause divorce and result from it. It grieves God to see children without the care and provision of both parents. God hates the betrayal of adultery. He hates all that comes with divorce.

God does hate divorce – but **He does not hate the people who get divorced**. God understands that people are distorted by sin, and that we bring sin and brokenness into all of our relationships. He knows we sometimes give in to our lustful desires, or make very bad decisions in the midst of conflict. He does not approve of this behavior; therefore, He has provided a righteous way of escape when we are tempted (1 Cor 10:13).

But when a man or woman choose their own selfish way, God understands the painful consequences of that sin. Therefore, there is some important discussion regarding divorce and remarriage in the Bible.

## OLD TESTAMENT

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 explains a procedure by which a husband may divorce his wife. *This passage does NOT give a divine sanction for divorce*, and should NOT be used as a blanket excuse for divorcing one's husband or wife. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of the sad fact that, because of human sin and brokenness, divorce has occurred among the Israelites.

## NEW TESTAMENT

One group of Pharisees in Jesus' time interpreted the "*uncleanness*" of Deuteronomy 24:1 to mean adultery. Thus, according to this group, adultery provided the only reason for divorce. But another group of more liberal Pharisees claimed that you could divorce a woman "*for just any reason*" (Matt 19:3), even just for personal dislike.

Jesus responds to both claims by reinforcing God's covenant principle within marriage (Matt 19:4-9). He points out that the only reason God allowed Moses to permit divorce was the hardness of human hearts (Matt 19:8). In every broken marriage covenant there is a heart hardened against one's mate, and against God's desire for marriage.

The difficulties and challenges encountered in *every marriage* could ultimately lead to divorce. IF a husband or wife follow their natural, fleshly inclinations and allow their heart to be hardened.

But Jesus reminds us that a hardened heart is not the best way. God is the One Who joins people in marriage, and He can change and soften hearts.

Restoration of the marriage is always the best solution. Jesus *strongly supports* God's original creation design and states bluntly, "*They are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate*" (Matt 19:6). Jesus makes it clear that believers must strive to preserve the marriage bond.

Scripture does allow a single exception for divorce: If one spouse commits sexual immorality, the other spouse does have grounds for divorce (Matt 19:9). However, even in this case, Jesus makes it clear that divorce was not God's original desire for marriage. "*From the beginning*" He reminds us, "*it was not so*" (v.8b). God is seen throughout the Scriptures as a God of redemption. He is the One Who provides the grace for repentance and forgiveness to bring people and situations back into wholeness. Thus, restoration of a damaged marriage, NOT divorce, is clearly God's highest desire.

## PAUL'S TEACHING ON DIVORCE

Paul also confronts the issue of divorce and remarriage in his first letter to the Corinthian church. In Corinthians 7, he gives both general and specific instructions regarding marriage relationships.

Like Jesus, Paul affirms the sanctity of the covenant relationship of husband and wife; he therefore reinforces the *permanency* of the bond of marriage.

Paul makes it clear that a Christian wife or husband should not depart from their marriage. "*Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife*" (1 Cor 7:10,11).

But Paul, realizing the potential for human failure, mentions that one spouse might still depart (v.11). However, if a Christian husband or wife departs from

the marriage, they are not to marry someone else (1 Cor 7:10, 11). [Note: Though Paul addresses this from a woman's perspective, the principle applies to both men and women.)

If the husband and wife do not reconcile and therefore choose to live apart, they are to remain *single* (not remarry) and *celibate* -in other words, Scripture forbids them from engaging in any sexual activity with another person. They may only remarry the spouse they divorced; or, if one dies, the other is then free to remarry another believer (1 Cor 7:39).

It is God's desire that a husband and wife be reconciled to each other. It is God's desire that forgiveness, reconciliation and *renewed commitment* to the marriage covenant be the primary goal of the husband and wife.

#### 4. Marriage To An Unbeliever

What if a Christian is married to a non-Christian (unbeliever)? Paul, as a founding apostle appointed by God (1 Cor 1:1) and writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, addresses this issue in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16.

(NOTE: Paul does say in 7:12, "*but to the rest I, not the Lord, say...*" Jesus did not address this issue, so Paul does. It is important to remember that Paul was speaking with an anointing and authority no other person has today.

There are modern-day apostles but they do not function with the same authority as did Paul or the other New Testament apostles. Paul does go on to say in 7:25, "*Now concerning virgins [single adults]: I have no commandment from the Lord [as to whether they are supposed to marry or not]; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy*" (see also 7:40). No other person has the authority or a "word" that is at the same level as, let alone supercedes, the written Word of God. The Bible is complete, and should **never** be changed, added to or subtracted from; read and memorize Revelation 22:18, 19).

The Bible is very clear that ***NO believer in Jesus Christ should marry a NON believer in Jesus Christ.*** This would make them "*unequally yoked*". [Study 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 for more on this subject.]

However, in 1 Corinthians 7:12- 16, Paul deals with the issue of a believer who is already married to an unbeliever. It is likely in the situation Paul describes that one spouse became a believer *after* the marriage took place.

Or, unfortunately, in spite of the very dear scriptural warnings against it, a believer sometimes disobeys and marries an unbeliever.

Paul gives the following guidelines for a believer who is married to an unbeliever:

- If the unbeliever wants to remain with the believing spouse, then the couple should definitely remain married (1 Cor 7:12,13). The believing spouse can possibly be a holy influence on the unbelieving spouse, and likewise on the children (vs.14, 16).
- If the unbelieving spouse initiates a divorce, then the believer is “not under bondage” to keep the marriage together (v.15). (Paul does not comment in this passage as to whether the believer is then free to remarry.)

Scripture makes it clear that divorce is NOT God’s best for His people. Those who commit themselves to live by scriptural principles in marriage will not consider divorce as an option.

However, because of the presence of sin in human hearts, many people – including, sadly, some Christians – may feel unable or unwilling to keep the marriage covenant.

But remember – divorce is allowable only in the case of sexual immorality or if an unbeliever departs and divorces the believer. Even in these instances, divorce should be the last option.

## REMARRIAGE FOR THE BELIEVER

The Bible does not allow for many of our modern ideas and practices concerning divorce and remarriage. Many people mistakenly believe that a believer who has divorced for any reason can remarry. But this is not the case. The Scriptures teach us that a Christian can remarry **only** when:

- His/ her first spouse committed sexual immorality and the marriage ended in divorce (Matt 5:32; 19:9)
- His/her spouse has died (Rom 7:3)

Some may add that a spouse abandoned by an unbeliever can also remarry: “*But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases*” (1 Cor 7:15). This verse does state that the abandoned spouse is “not *under bondage*” (they are free from marital

obligation to the spouse that departed). But it does not state whether or not the abandoned spouse is then free to remarry.

We must carefully consider the consequences of our actions when contemplating marriage, divorce or remarriage. God has made it clear that marriage is a serious covenant, intended to be made **once for a lifetime**. According to the Bible, Christians do NOT have the option to divorce and remarry, except under very limited circumstances (as already discussed).

The destructive effects of sin in people, and thus in their relationships, can create terrible circumstances in a home. Terrible arguing or violence may take place, leading to harm or physical abuse. This is NEVER acceptable behavior for believers. But when these situations do occur, the Bible does not specifically address what a marriage partner is to do. HOWEVER, if there is sinful behavior that threatens to destroy a marriage or harm a family member, help should be sought out immediately. Through counseling, prayer, and biblical teaching on godly and loving behavior, people and their marriages can be protected and preserved.

## WHEN IS REMARRIAGE A SIN?

Despite the clear instructions of Scripture, there are still occasions when Christians break their marriage covenant, and divorce outside the limits of what Scripture permits. Often, remarriage to another person follows. Sadly, the desire for a different marriage partner is often why a spouse divorces.

Jesus addressed divorcing for the purpose of remarriage in Matthew 5:31, 32 and 19:1-9. He was speaking to the Pharisees, who were divorcing their wives for the sole reason of marrying another woman. Jesus made it clear that this behavior is unacceptable for both men and women – neither should ever consider divorce so that they can marry another.

Those who divorce and remarry outside of what the Bible permits have, as Jesus said, “*committed adultery*” (Matthew 19:9). They have broken their marriage covenant without scriptural cause; they have then added to their sin by marrying another and thereby committing adultery.

Many believers are mistakenly taught that this type of unscriptural divorce and remarriage is acceptable. It is NOT! Divorce without scriptural cause, followed by remarriage to another, is a serious sin.

Once a believer faces the fact that he/ she has committed this type of adultery, he/she must:

- come to God in true and heartfelt **repentance**
- ask for God's **forgiveness** and be cleansed of this unrighteousness
- humbly and prayerfully consider what else they should do to **make right the wrongs** they have committed (such as providing for the children they may have abandoned from a prior marriage).

## IS A SECOND MARRIAGE VALID?

Though remarriage under unscriptural circumstances is not God's ideal, the Bible does seem to indicate that a second marriage is a valid covenant.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 describes a woman who has been divorced because of "*uncleanness*" (v.1). The Bible says that when she remarries, she "*becomes another man's wife*" (v.2). Thus, the Bible acknowledges that the two became husband and wife in covenant marriage, even though it was her second marriage.

However, believers must be warned that they cannot continue the pattern of divorce and remarriage based on selfish desires and unscriptural terms. If they do, they are destroying their Christian character and making themselves displeasing to God – and they will surely account for such willful rebellion against God and His Word.

As a church leader, you must be wary of men or women who claim to be believers, yet have been divorced and remarried numerous times for unscriptural reasons – especially after they have learned what the Bible teaches about the subject. They may appear godly, or even to have gifts for ministry. But if their lives reflect unrighteousness (Matt 7:15-20; 2 Tim 3:1-9) and a lack of repentance, they may attempt to pull others into their adulterous behavior.

## DIVORCE IN OUR UNSAVED PAST

There may be some in your church who were married and divorced before they received Christ and became His disciples. This is very common in our world today.

Before Christ comes into their hearts, people are led by their sinful and selfish desires. This can result in many broken marriages and emotionally wounded people.

Once people receive Christ as Savior, their sins are forgiven (Eph 1:7; Col 2:13). God even declares that He has forgotten their former evil deeds (Heb 10:17). Everyone who receives Christ has become a new creature, with a new nature. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”* (2 Cor 5:17).

Self-condemnation over sin committed before salvation is NOT from God, and is not pleasing to God (Rom 8:1). We can -we **must** receive God’s full forgiveness purchased for us on the Cross by His Son, Jesus Christ.

It is unfortunate that new believers may have divorce and adultery in their past. They can rarely go back and fix the wrongs they have done. But they must realize that these things are part of the darkness of their **unsaved past**. As a “new creature in Christ” they must now *“walk as children of light”* (Eph 5:8) – through good works (Eph 2:10), setting a Christ-like example (1 Tim 4:12), and witnessing for Christ (Acts 1:8).

Some preachers have said that a new Christian who is divorced and remarried should divorce their current spouse, and try to reconcile with their original spouse. But this would mean dissolving yet another marriage covenant.

Paul exhorts that we should be *“forgetting those things [sinful deeds] which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead”* and *“press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Phil 3:13,14).

## CONCLUSION

The issue of divorce and remarriage is a very difficult and painful one. Scripture does not give us a detailed set of rules that cover every possible circumstance. However, the Bible does give *clear principles* for how we should live our lives and conduct our relationships as believers.

When instructing and counseling the people in our churches, we must speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15). We must then pray for the Holy Spirit to convict

them, and for God to lead them into obedience to His Word and will. Sin is to be repented from and abandoned, not accommodated or allowed.

It can be a very painful and difficult process for people to acknowledge their sin and repent. Yet the Lord's grace is sufficient, even for this.

Remember: Divorce never **needs** to occur if we diligently follow God's principles for marriage and relationships. Every Christian, married or not, needs to *daily* invite the presence, power, love and wisdom of God's Spirit into his/her heart, home and relationships – as well as diligently study God's Word and follow its instructions for relationships. This will give us the wealth of God's divine resource to draw upon, and will enable us to keep our marriage covenant and maintain a godly relationship with our spouse.

## 5. The Church Leader: Setting A Godly Example

You are a church leader. Therefore, you have an even greater responsibility to understand, and consistently live by, the Word of God. You need to give your marriage the kind of work and loving attention it needs to become a shining picture of Christ's love for His Church (Eph 5:22-32).

You are not perfect, so your marriage will probably not be perfect either. But you should always strive to grow and improve in your walk with God. As you are transformed and renewed in your mind (Rom 12:2), you will become more Christ like – more like God wants you to be. This will make you a more loving, faithful, devoted spouse – and thereby strengthen and deepen your marriage relationship.

As a leader, you represent God and His ways to the people you lead. When you are faithful to your spouse, you will be a powerful illustration of God's love and faithfulness to His people. This will assure those you lead that they can and should always work to improve their marriage – to love more, give more, and serve more than ever before.

## TEACH OTHERS ALSO

As a church leader, you must **never** encourage or try to justify divorce. You must encourage those who are experiencing marital difficulty to give and express forgiveness in their marriage. Forgiveness is one of the primary keys to a successful marriage. [This subject will be covered in more detail later in this teaching.] God desires reconciliation of relationships.

But what if there are people in your church who are divorced? What should you as a church leader do?

Be careful not to, like the Pharisees, treat divorced people in a condemning way. Instead -while upholding the standards of Scripture – reach out with God’s love and mercy to help them be restored to wholeness. Remember, although God does hate divorce, He does not hate the person who is divorced. God’s love and forgiveness are fully and freely available to all who have failed or sinned, when they call upon Him in repentance (1 John 1:9).

There is so much confusion and improper teaching on the subject of marriage and divorce. This is complicated by the careless approach some people have to the marriage commitment today. Sadly, in many countries, the divorce rate for Christians is just as high as for non- Christians. ***This should never be!*** But because of this, many people find themselves in very difficult and complicated situations. They may have been divorced and remarried several times; they may have children from many spouses, etc.

They finally come to a point of repentance, realizing that they have not lived their lives according to God’s Word. What, then, is the best way to counsel them about what they should do from now on?

In John 8:1-11, Jesus shows us how to minister forgiveness and restoration without compromising the godly principles of Scripture. The Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They wanted to try and trick Jesus, so they asked Him if she should be stoned. He replied, *“he who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first”* (v.7). When the crowd departed, having been convicted of their own sinfulness, Jesus told the woman, *“Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more”* (v.11).

It is clear that the woman was living an adulterous lifestyle. But Jesus declared the truth to her, and then exhorted her to stop sinning and go her way. She couldn’t change what she had done in her past; only Jesus’ forgiveness could do that. But she was to stop her sinful behavior, and change her lifestyle **from that moment forward.**

People can rarely go back and fix the problems their sinful or unwise behavior has caused in their own lives or in the lives of others. But they **can** repent and receive God’s forgiveness for their sin. Then, having repented, they can begin to live life according to the Scriptures from then onward. If there is something they can do to fix the problems, and alleviate the pain they have

caused, they should of course do that (for example, supporting the children of their previous marriage).

God will give them the wisdom and grace they need to move forward in their walk with Him, and make good and godly decisions that are based on His Word and His will.

## 6. Sexual Standards For Christian Marriage

Our ability to have a sexual relationship was something God created. It is important to remember that it was God Who created them “*male and female*” (Gen 1:27). God gave man and woman the ability to share sexual intimacy, and to enjoy it. Sexuality is part of God’s loving plan for marriage.

But sexuality, **when used improperly**, can cause pain and destruction in our lives and the lives of others.

..... To understand this more dearly, think of sex as though it were **fire**. Fire is a helpful tool that God gave us. Fire enables us to cook our food and thus stop our hunger. Fire gives us light and warmth. Fire can protect us by keeping away predators. Fire can be used to forge or make tools or objects of beauty.

But in order to provide these benefits, fire must be **controlled**. It must be used very carefully and kept within proper limits. At the *right time*, in the *right place*, and in the *right situation*, fire is a blessing and a helpful tool.

But what happens if fire gets out of control? It could destroy your food, your belongings, even your entire house. Fire out of control (at the *wrong time*, in the *wrong place*, in the *wrong situation*) can cause great harm and destruction – even loss of life.

Like fire, our sexual nature and drive was given to us by God. He intended it to be used at the *right time*, in the *right place*, and in the *right situation*. The Word of God gives us very dear instructions on how our sexual nature is to be used in order to be good and beneficial, instead of harmful and destructive.

The Bible states very dearly that the **ONLY** time, the **ONLY** place, and the **ONLY** situation in which sexuality is to be experienced and expressed is **within marriage, between a husband and a wife**. All other sexual

encounters are **sin** (iniquity) in the eyes of God. Sex outside of the marriage relationship is sin and must therefore be rejected by every Christian believer.

Please take a moment now to look up the following Bible passages: Exodus 20:14; Proverbs 2:10-19; 6:23-29; 7:6-27; Matthew 5:28; Romans 6:10-13; 12:1, 2; 13:14; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 13-20; Galatians 5:16-25; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 John 2:15-17; Revelation 21:8.

These are just a *few* of the many Old and New Testament passages about proper and improper sexual behavior. Take the time to study each one carefully.

It is important to understand that the Bible – and thus God Himself – does **not** regard human sexuality as something dirty, profane or bad. Rather, the Scriptures reveal that our sexual nature is created by God, intended by Him to be a blessing ***within the marriage union***.

## HEALTHY SEXUAL FULFILLMENT IN MARRIAGE

The scriptural view of human sexuality is based on the following concept: ***Marriage should reflect the loving relationship between God and His people***. Therefore, faithfulness and grace-filled sensitivity are called for from both husband and wife.

Many Old Testament cultures (and many cultures today) had one set of rules for men, and a different set of rules for women. Often in such cultures it is considered acceptable for a man (married or unmarried) to do whatever he wishes in order to satisfy his sexual desires; women, however, are restricted to sexual activity with their husband.

But the Bible teaches that adultery (sex with someone who is not your spouse) is a sin, whether committed by a man or by a woman. This sin was punishable by stoning in the Old Testament (see Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:18). The New Testament speaks just as strongly against adultery (Gal 5:19-21), though not making it punishable by stoning.

We, as Christian men and women, must remember that the Holy Spirit has come to live in us (2 Cor 1:22). We are supernaturally joined to Christ and His Body (1 Cor 6: 17; 12:13,14). Our physical body is a ***“temple of the Holy Spirit”*** (1 Cor 6:19). Therefore, we must keep our physical body holy (1 Cor 6:13-20).

The physical body of every Christian man and woman is to be a holy instrument of God (Rom 6:12,13; 2 Tim 2:19-21) to be used **ONLY** in a godly way. Our body is NEVER for sexual activity with anyone other than our own husband or wife (Heb 13:4).

The unholy use of our bodies for immoral sexual behavior – and the unholy use of our hearts and minds for lust or adulterous fantasies – violates the holy image of God in which we were created.

***What then is acceptable and healthy in the sexual relationship between a husband and wife within marriage?*** Following are some key Biblical principles to help answer this important question.

God created both male and female (Gen 1:27) for more than just producing offspring. He created them to help and complete one another. They are to enjoy companionship, friendship, and the intimate sharing of a life-long loving relationship.

The life-long unity of a husband and wife in marriage – their loyalty and faithfulness to each other – is symbolized by their physical (sexual) union. The bonding that occurs at this basic and intimate level will confirm, maintain and enhance this life-long unity.

The sexual union of a husband and wife deepens the bond between them – their “one-flesh” unity – and is therefore sacred and holy to God.

## **IS SEX UNHOLY?**

There were some in New Testament times who thought it was more “spiritual” to not allow sexual intimacy in marriage. Some even went so far as to forbid marriage (1 Tim 4:3). Paul addresses this issue, and states that such teachings are “*giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*” (1 Tim 4:1).

Paul addressed a similar situation when he wrote to the church in Corinth. Some of the Christians there had begun to believe and teach that followers of Christ were not to marry. Those who were married were being told to abstain from sexual intimacy in order to have a “purely spiritual” relationship.

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives godly marital counsel to the Corinthians and to us:

*“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. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor 7:3-5).*

Paul makes it very clear that neither the husband nor the wife should withhold sexual intimacy from their spouse. The sexual relationship is an important part of the marriage union. Both partners are to freely and willingly participate.

However, Paul does give three conditions for a married couple to *temporarily* stop sexual activity in marriage (v.5):

1. It should be by mutual consent (they should both agree).
2. It must be for a limited time (not too long)
3. It should be for spiritual reasons (not out of selfishness, anger, resentment, etc.)

There are other times in the lives of a married couple when sexual activity might be temporarily set aside – for example, during the latter stages of pregnancy, or if one spouse is ill or disabled.

In the Old Testament, sexual activity during the time of a woman’s menstrual cycle (*“impurity”*) was considered inappropriate (Lev 15:19, 24).

There are times when sexual activity in marriage may or may not be appropriate. But the important issue is that both the husband and wife need to walk in grace and sensitivity to each other. Both should be willing participants in sexual activity, and not feel forced upon or unduly pressured. Both should also agree together when deciding that sexual activity will be halted for a season.

It is important for a husband and wife to dearly communicate their needs and desires to each other about **everything** in their marriage. This is especially important when dealing with something as intimate and personal as their sexual relationship.

Human sexual needs and desires were meant to be satisfied – and **can be** satisfied – ***within the bond of marriage***. Sexual relations are the seal and

symbol of commitment and intimacy in marriage. The sexual part of the marriage relationship helps maintain that commitment and deepen that intimacy.

Our human sexual nature was created by God. Since He made us this way, He intends for us to use and enjoy our sexuality as He has instructed us. God made us with the ability to enjoy many different sensations. We can see colors, taste food, appreciate beauty, and feel emotions. Our Heavenly Father “*gives us richly all things to **enjoy***” (1 Tim 6:17).

God also gave us sexual desires, to enjoy ***within marriage***. Read the Song of Solomon; it is a joyous celebration of intimate love in marriage. The fact that this book is included in the Holy Scriptures helps us understand that God wants us to have an exciting and fulfilling relationship with our spouse. He made us that way and gave us that ability. There is no guilt or shame in having a joyful sexual relationship ***within the godly bond of marriage***.

## A HELPFUL GUIDELINE

There is a passage of Scripture related to sex in marriage that can sometimes be misunderstood: “*Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled*” (Heb 13:4a). What does the writer mean by this statement?

This statement is best understood as an exhortation for a married couple to protect their intimate union from perversions (“*fornicators and adulterers*”, v.4b).

However, it also serves as a reminder that sex between a husband and wife ***within marriage*** is not given specific restrictions in the Bible; it is instead given much freedom. To live in this freedom, however, requires a *guiding principle*. The principle that should guide a married couple in their sexual relationship is this:

***A married couple is free to experience and express whatever their sexual desire is with each other, as long as it is by mutual consent and agreement*** – and as long as it does NOT include sexual practices forbidden in Scripture (see the next section of this article for more about this).

Remember, sexual activity is a way to ***physically express love*** to your spouse. So the chapter in the Bible devoted to love – 1 Corinthians 13 – is an

excellent guide for sexual intimacy. Ask yourself: In the sexual part of your marriage – and in all areas of your marriage -are you:

- Patient and kind?
- Not jealous or proud?
- Not conceited or rude?
- Never self-seeking or insistent on your own way?
- Not oversensitive or holding a grudge?
- Not counting up past wrongs?
- Believing the best of your spouse?
- Protective, trusting, patient?

Take some time to read and study 1 Corinthians 13. Pray about your relationship with your spouse. Ask the Lord to shape you into the kind of person that will be a blessing to your spouse. The Lord will help you!

## SEXUAL PRACTICES PROHIBITED IN SCRIPTURE

- ***Sexual activity outside of the marriage relationship is strictly forbidden by God.***

This includes both sexual activity before marriage (fornication) and sexual activity with someone other than your spouse (adultery).

It does not matter what your circumstances are. The Bible permits sexual activity **ONLY** between a husband and wife. ***There are no exceptions!***

God made us, and He knows how we will best be fulfilled and protected. **HE** is the One Who established the boundaries for sexual activity -for our blessing. To realize the terrible consequences of sex outside of marriage, just look at the circumstances in the lives of so many people today. Much of the disease and pain and many of the problems afflicting people and their families have come from willful disobedience to God's commands. He dearly instructs us to keep sexual activity between a husband and wife only. Tragedy and destruction will result if we use our bodies and desires in a way that God never intended.

- Homosexuality (sexual activity with a person of the same gender, such as man to man or woman to woman) and sexual intercourse with animals are *strictly forbidden* in God's Word (see Leviticus 18:22- 24; Corinthians 6:9-11).
- Prostitution is also forbidden in the Bible (see Leviticus 19:29; 1 Corinthians 6:15-20). Most of the Old Testament references to prostitution concerned the use of male or female prostitutes in pagan and idolatrous religious rituals. This practice of prostitution is especially deplorable since faithfulness to the covenant relationship of marriage is a picture of God's love and faithfulness to us.

The New Testament adds an especially important reason to avoid prostitutes. If we are members of the Body of Christ, how can we join His members (ourselves) to a prostitute? (see 1 Corinthians 6:15- 20).

- Galatians 5:16, 17 clearly states that our natural "*flesh lusts against the Spirit*" and that the flesh and Spirit are "*contrary to one another*". Our natural, fleshly desires fight against godly, spiritual things. This is a very real battle that we all fight. But we *can* decide to honor the Holy Spirit and *not* fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Rom 13:14; Gal 5:16; 1 Pet 2:11).

As Christians, we have the Spirit of God within us (1 Cor 3:16). Therefore, we must not practice fleshly lusts specifically listed in Galatians 5:19-21. In addition to adultery and fornication, the list includes "*uncleanness*" (this covers all types of sexual defilement) and "*lewdness*" (a brazen display of unclean sexual behavior).

Some try to justify sexual intimacy between *unmarried* partners based on a "commitment to" or "love for" each other. This goes against the holiness of God and the Biblical standards of purity. It is *never* right to indulge in or arouse sinful lust, or to participate in unbiblical behavior (Eph 4:17- 24; 1 Pet 4:2, 3).

- The Bible does not comment specifically on the activities of pornography and masturbation (sexual stimulation of oneself); however, these activities are symptoms of a much deeper problem that the Bible **does** address.

Jesus said that He came to "*fulfill*" the Law (Matt 5:17). This meant in part that He came to reveal the *true meaning* of the Law of God. Jesus warns that entering His Kingdom requires a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees (Matt 5:20). What does He mean?

Jesus was emphasizing the absolute importance of a *righteousness of the heart* -not just an outward display of legalism or religiosity like the Pharisees had. The Pharisees were concerned only with an outward show of righteousness – how they appeared to others. They practiced an outward conformity to the letter of the Law, but *inside* they were still unrighteous and unchanged.

Jesus called instead for *inward righteousness* in the hearts of men (see Matthew 23:23-28 for more of Jesus' words about this). Our concern should not be how godly we appear to others, but how godly our heart is in the sight of God. "*The Lord looks at the heart*" (1 Sam 16:7).

With this understanding, let us look at Matthew 5:27, 28: "*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'*"

The Law expressly forbids adultery. But Jesus explains that the act of adultery is a result of lust that is *already in the heart*. The sin did not begin with the *act* of adultery; it began first in the *thoughts* of the mind and *intent* of the heart. Jesus acknowledges that the Law can control outward human behavior to a certain extent. Yet He clearly shows that God is concerned with the inward content of the heart and mind.

In Matthew 5:27, 28, Jesus reveals that the *desire* to commit adultery **is still adultery** – even if it lacks the *opportunity* to actually do it. The sin is not just the *act* of adultery; the sin of adultery also includes the lustful desire in the mind and heart that *leads to the act* of adultery. The Pharisees' legalistic attitude stressed outward actions, but ignored the sinful desires of the heart. Jesus is not referring to the momentary lustful thoughts that can sometimes come into the mind. Such thoughts should be quickly repented of and the mind immediately returned to righteous thoughts (see 2 Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:2).

Jesus is, however, addressing *lingering imaginations* –such as lusting for a specific woman or desiring impure actions with her. Indulging in prolonged sexual fantasies reveals impurity in a person's heart and mind. These imaginations and fantasies are sinful and must be repented of and changed – before they lead to even more destructive and sinful behavior.

Much of what is in the mind must first enter through the eyes. This is especially true of men regarding sexual matters. What a man looks on with desire will enter his mind, influence his thoughts and affect his behavior. It is significant that the Greek word in the New Testament for “prostitution” (*porneia*.) forms the root word for “pornography”. When one looks at pornography (sexual pictures), it enters the mind. A person who looks at pornography is virtually prostituting himself with someone who is not his spouse. This is why Jesus calls it adultery (Matt 5:28).

Continued use of pornography and sexual fantasy will affect our behavior. *“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he”* (Prov. 23:7).

Therefore, *“keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life”* (Prov 4:23).

The things that we persistently think upon will change our behavior, our lives and our destiny. This is why it is so important to obey Scripture when it exhorts us to think about things that are pure, godly and Christ-like (Phil 4:8; see also Romans 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Ephesians 4:22-24).

The Bible instructs us to give place to the Spirit, and not to the flesh (Gal 5:16-25); to not yield the members of our body to sin, but rather yield them to Christ (Rom 6:12-14). Based on these and many other Bible verses, we can confidently conclude that pornography and masturbation have ***no place*** in the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The commandments of God regarding sexual immorality are given through His own loving character. He does not want to deny us pleasure or joy; He is the One Who has equipped us to experience it!

However, He knows how we are made. Since He is our Maker, He knows how we will function best. He is fully aware of the damage and brokenness that result from disobeying His divine instructions regarding our sexual behavior.

God’s laws and principles are given to protect us and to enable each one: of us to have a fruitful fulfilling, joy-filled and lifelong relationship with our spouse.

## THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF A CHRISTIAN HUSBAND

## INTRODUCTION

Societies and cultures throughout the world have their concepts of what a man should be and how he should behave. Unfortunately, these concepts are rarely based on the truth of God's Word, the Bible. Commonly accepted behavior for a man or husband is often influenced by earthly ideas and sinful human flesh.

Our concern as Christians, however, is only for what *God desires us to be*.

The clearest and best portrayal of what our Creator God intends for a man or husband to be is found in the Word of God, the Scriptures. The Bible gives us the principles for acceptable behavior and the *example* of the life of Jesus; both show us how to live in a manner that is pleasing to God.

## GODLY LEADERSHIP STARTS AT HOME

It is vital to recognize that ALL Scripture concerning the Christian's life is intended to be lived out *in the home first*. For instance, the Bible instructs us to "*be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you*" (Eph 4:32). This is to be applied at home in our relationships with those closest to us first.

Often, however, we try to behave in a Christ-like manner in public places, with those whom we see only occasionally. Yet at home with those we are comfortable with and not as concerned with impressing – we may allow our sinful or fleshly nature to rule our behavior or attitudes. The Bible calls this *hypocrisy*.

One of the things that marked the Pharisees of Jesus' day was their hypocrisy. They appeared very religious, moral and righteous in public. But their inner attitudes and behavior were really very sinful. Jesus called them "*whitewashed tombs*" (Matt 23:23-28) because they had an outward appearance that hid the sinful attitudes they held in their hearts.

It is much easier to be kind to those whom we might only see occasionally in public places. We may not be truly forgiving or tenderhearted toward them, but we can *pretend* we are for a short time. But when we live every day with

someone, it is much harder to pretend. The attitudes that are *truly* in our hearts begin to show.

No one is perfect in his behavior all the time. God understands that we can be weak and may sometimes fail (Rom 3:23). We should not come under condemnation and give up trying to live as the Scriptures instruct. The Bible gives us clear help and instructions for how to grow in godly behavior and become more Christ-like every day.

If we are truly Christians – followers of Jesus Christ -we will no longer live in a way that serves our own fleshly desires. Instead, the Bible tells us to “*put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh*” (Rom 13:14).

When we do this, we will not “*give place [opportunity] to the devil*” (Eph 4:27) to work through our *lives* to hurt us and others.

It is very important that all men- especially those who are leaders in the Church – understand and **practice** Scriptural principles. We should not just hear the Word -we should do what it says (Jas 1:22- 25). And the first and best place for a church leader to practice what the Bible teaches is in his home, with his own spouse and family.

The Apostle Paul gave a very dear exhortation to Timothy about the qualifications of elders and deacons (church leaders). These qualifications are all directly related to how the leader lives in his home.

Open your Bible and read 1 Timothy 3:1-13, especially verse 5. A person who has learned to behave righteously and keep good relationships with those in his home will also know how to *be* a wise and godly leader in the church. A person must first function as an elder (or deacon) at home; then he will have learned how to also rule well in the church. It is dear, then, that the principles of Scripture that should be applied to behavior in the church should also guide our behavior and relationships in the home.

Let us now examine the portion of Scripture that most clearly addresses the biblical role of a Christian husband: Ephesians 5:22-33.

## **THE GREATEST COMMAND:**

### **TO LOVE OUR WIVES**

Ephesians 5:22-33 gives husbands *and* wives commands that are essential to having a God-honoring and healthy, nurturing marriage relationship. This article will look specifically at the commands given to **men** in order that they might fulfill their God-given role as husbands.

Ephesians 5:25 states the most crucial and foundational part of a man's responsibility to his wife: He is to love her. "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved ... Church and gave Himself for Her*" (Eph 5:25). This verse clearly shows the most important responsibility of the Christian husband to his wife is to love her.

Just as love is the "greatest" of the Christian virtues (1 Cor 13:13), so is love the greatest key to a healthy, fruitful and lasting marriage. The husband is told three times in Ephesians 5 (vs 25, 28, 33) that he is to love his wife. This triple-repeated emphasis in one section of Scripture makes it very clear that a husband is to love his wife!

It is when the wife knows that she is truly loved that she will more freely respond in godly submission to her husband's headship (Eph 5:22-24). However, a husband's love for his wife should not be based upon her response. He should love her in **obedience to God's commands**, and leave her response up to God.

But how does a man love his wife? How is the biblical kind of love in Ephesians 5:25 shown from a man to his wife?

## **A CHOICE – NOT A FEELING**

Many people mistakenly believe that love is just a special kind of feeling you have for someone you like. Love does involve our feelings. However, true love goes far beyond just what a man feels for his wife. Real love involves **a choice of the will**, and results in actions that demonstrate that love.

Scripture tells us that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church (Eph 5:25). How then did Christ love the Church? How did He demonstrate His love? Verse 25 says that Christ "*gave Himself for her [the Church]*". Christ loved the Church by the example of His selfless death. "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom 5:8; see also John 15:13).

Christ gave up His physical life when He died on the cross for the Church. But He also gave Himself in that He died to His **self-life**. He laid aside His own desires, comfort and pleasure in order to serve a higher calling.

Scripture reveals that Christ came to obey the Father's will and word (John 5:19, 30; 14:31) and to serve the Church (Matt 20:28). Christ lived only to obey God the Father's will and for the benefit of the Church. Christ did not require anything from the Church except that she, too, learn obedience to God.

As a result of Christ's selfless love, the true Church chooses to love Christ and submit to Him. *"We love Him because He first loved us"* (1 John 4:19). In that same way, when a wife is loved by her husband she will more readily respond with both love and submission.

In order for a husband to truly love his wife in a Christ-like way, he will also have to lay down his self-life. Putting his own wants and desires behind the needs of his wife may be very hard to do. It takes much more than romantic feelings for a husband to love his wife in such a selfless way. But a husband is to lay down his life if he truly desires to love his wife as Christ loved the Church. But what does that mean?

Philippians 2:3-8 helps reveal the self-sacrificing kind of love required for a husband to love his wife: *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."*

*Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, 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."* Believers are exhorted to let the mind of Christ be formed in us (v.5). We are *also* told not to focus on our own selfish desires, but to instead consider the needs of others first (vs.3, 4). What better place to practice this kind of godly behavior than with our spouse!

## **A DEEPER KIND OF LOVE**

Jesus was truly God (v.6), but He did not hold onto His "position". Rather, He emptied Himself of His privileges (2 Cor 8:9) in order to become a servant for

our sakes (Phil 2:7). He chose to walk humbly and obey the Father, even though it meant dying a painful and horrible death that He did not deserve (v.8).

Why did He do this? **Because of His great love for us, His Bride!**

This is the same kind of selfless love a husband is to have for his wife. This type of love goes far beyond feelings. It must be rooted in a heart-felt desire to obey God and be shaped into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).

A man's "feelings" are usually based on what he wants. But the kind of unconditional love a man is to have for his wife is not based on what the husband wants. It is a selfless love that goes beyond human desires. It is a much deeper kind of love that is not possible for a husband to give unless he first receives it from his Heavenly Father and His Son through the Holy Spirit.

There are four basic words for love in the Greek language (the original language of the New Testament): **storge**, **eros**, **phileo**, and **agape**.

**Storge** is a family love, like one would have for a brother or sister, or parent to child. It describes a strong bond between two people based on relationship.

**Eros** is love based on physical desires. It is the kind of emotion that may attract a man and woman to each other. The Greeks used this word to describe a sexual or romantic kind of love. This type of love is important in marriage, as it provides a way to express and grow in your oneness as a couple. God designed this expression of love *only for marriage* (Prov 5:15-18; 1 Cor 7:3-5). But Eros is essentially a selfish kind of love.

**Phileo** is a friendship love. It is the kind of love to be found in the Church. This word shows a desire to give love to someone because you enjoy them or receive pleasure from the relationship. It too, is still somewhat selfish.

**Agape** is a radically unselfish love. Unlike both *eros* and *phileo*, *agape* love is based on the character of the one doing the loving. It is an unearned, unconditional kind of love that goes well beyond simple emotion or attraction.

This is the kind of love God has for you and me. And this is the same kind of love God commands husbands to have for their wives.

*Agape love* begins with and comes from God. This kind of love forms the foundation of the marriage covenant. A married couple's love may be tested

by failure, disappointment, difficulty, sorrow or temptation. It is at these times (and other times as well) that we must draw from God's unconditional love – first *for* us, and then given *through* us to our spouse. We must make a choice with our will (not our feelings) to allow God's love to enter our hearts and be given out to our spouse. We must pray for God to help us love as He loves; and pray for Him to teach us how to love in such a selfless way. When a husband obeys God's word to love his wife as Christ loves the Church, he can fully expect God's supernatural power and love to be released into his marriage.

## LOVE- MORE THAN ATTRACTION

Fleshly, worldly love is always seeking to get, not to give. A person may feel a desire to love based on physical appearance, intelligence, talents or wealth.

But these feelings are very temporary; they do not last. And when the feelings or attraction go away, one thinks that they are “no longer in love” and may end the marriage. Or if a husband has strong feelings for a woman other than his wife, he may think he is “in love” with her and may even want to leave his wife.

This is NOT the kind of “love” God commands for marriage.

The love a Christian husband has for his wife might involve some initial attraction. That is normal and right. But that is not love; that is simply attraction. The husband who loves a wife for her appearance or for what she can give him is loving with a worldly, fleshly love.

**Agape love** (selfless and committed) looks **to give**. A godly husband puts his own desires, preferences, likes and dislikes behind the needs of his wife. He must be willing to live sacrificially in order to serve and bless his wife, and truly love her.

In Ephesians 5:28, 29, husbands are told to love their wives as their own bodies. A man cares for, protects, feeds and shelters his body. A wife is “one flesh” with her husband (vs.30-33) and should be treated with the same concern, care and respect as a husband would give his own body.

## MARRIAGE: A SACRED COVENANT

When a man chooses to marry, he is making a **covenant commitment** to his wife before God. This is a “heavenly contract” that is not to be broken. A man

is committing to love and care for his wife, just as Christ does the Church. This is a serious responsibility that should not be entered into lightly.

This covenant is not based on feelings. It is normal to have romantic feelings or attraction to a spouse. But these feelings may come and go throughout a lifetime of marriage. What is permanent and unchanging is the deep and genuine commitment to our spouse – no matter what may happen in life.

This **covenant commitment** is the basis of real, lasting love. God does not love us on the basis of His feelings or how well we are performing – No! Christ has committed His love to the Church no matter what happens. Husbands are commanded to love their wives in that same way (Eph 5:25, 28, 33; Col 3:19).

### **ASK FOR GOD'S HELP!**

Wives, like husbands, are imperfect and may not always be easy to love. A husband may be tempted to become frustrated, angry or impatient with his wife. He may not have feelings of love for his wife, or may not desire to love her. He may feel that loving his wife as Christ loves the Church is an impossible task!

At those times, remember that *“the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who was given to us”* (Rom 5:5). God has given husbands the ability to love their wives in every circumstance through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a man's privilege and responsibility to let God's love flow through him to his wife, especially in difficult times (Col 3:19).

It is also helpful to find, talk to and pray with another Christian man who understands how to love his wife. A man is not a good husband just because he gets married; it can take many years of loving, sacrificing and praying to become the kind of husband God wants you to be. A husband will fail and make mistakes, just as a wife will. It takes time for the character and nature of Christ to be worked into our lives. God is loving and patient; turn to Him often to ask for His help as you grow in becoming a godly husband.

### **A GODLY GUIDELINE FOR LOVE**

A good and godly way for husbands and wives to practice loving their spouse is to study 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 often. Read this passage daily, and pray for God to help you love your spouse in this selfless way.

Perhaps you could choose one key phrase each week to work on, such as “*love is... kind*” (v.4). Each day of that week, practice extra kindness toward your spouse.

If you experience weakness or failure in loving your spouse, be quick to apologize. If you get impatient, admit it to them and ask for forgiveness. Pray together with your spouse, and together ask God to deliver you from your weaknesses and knit your hearts in love for one another.

## **PRACTICAL SERVICE**

Love for a spouse should be reflected in actions as well as words. Husbands must learn to be sensitive to their wives. They must take the time to listen to them, and respond with words of comfort or encouragement.

A husband should take the time to help his wife with household chores, or with the children. The caring for the home and family is the responsibility of both the husband and wife.

There are many ways for a husband to show love, concern and care for his wife. This is something a husband should work on daily. Remember, a husband is to care for his wife as much as he would care for his own body (Eph 5:28, 29).

## **THE GREATEST PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY:**

### **HEADSHIP**

The biblical principle of headship and authority in the home is vitally important for a husband to understand. It is essential for a good marriage and happy family. And a home in scriptural order is one of the key requirements for leadership in the Church (1 Tim 3:2-12).

Ephesians 5:23 clearly shows the husband as the head of the family: “*For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is Head of the Church; and He is the Savior of the body.*” Unfortunately, the biblical meaning of *headship* is often misunderstood and abused. Let us examine the true meaning of headship.

## **SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY: A GOD-APPOINTED SERVICE**

Sin entered the human race at the Fall (Genesis 3). The chaos and brokenness resulting from sin caused a need for right order to again be established. Thus, God has appointed that specific authority (rulership) be given to certain people. Because this order of authority is from God, it is therefore good (see Romans 13:1-7). But what people do with that God given authority and power is not always good.

God places people in positions of authority for the good of those they serve: to protect them from harm, guide them with wisdom, and rule well over them to keep order and peace. Consequently, God strongly disapproves when people misuse their authority and power for their own selfish gain.

Whether it is in government, at a job or in a marriage, those who do not carefully and wisely use their authority will come under judgment. Each man, as a husband or a citizen (or leader) of a nation, will give an account for how he has used the authority God has given him.

The authority given by God is on temporary loan from God to mankind. He releases to mankind particular authority – within clearly defined scriptural limits -for the purpose of keeping order while we come into full and total submission to God. Once all of mankind is in full subjection to God at the “end of the age”, there will be no need for the same system of authority that we now have on earth. All authority will be back in God’s hands (1 Cor 15:20-28).

In the meantime, God has set up a system of authority for people to follow. One position of specific authority established by God is that of a husband in his home.

### **THE HUSBAND’S AUTHORITY**

God has given authority to the husband to be head in his home (Eph 5:23). This authority is always to be used for the best good of the wife and children. It is NOT to be used to serve a husband’s selfish desires. A husband is not a dictator or tyrant, whose every wish is to be unquestionably obeyed. His wife and children are not his slaves, nor his possessions. They belong to God, and the husband is charged to carefully and lovingly “rule over” his household as a good steward (Luke 12:42) of what belongs to God.

This authority God has loaned to husbands does not give them rights. Instead, a husband is given the privilege and responsibility to lead and care for his wife and children in a Christ-like manner. Please open your Bible and read Philippians 2:1-8. Review what it means to be Christ-like in attitude and behavior.

Christ our Savior is the model of a husband's authority (Eph 5:23- 29). He was a servant Who washed our feet (John 13:1-17); He showed great love, patience and endurance; He was faithful even when those He loved were not; He even took upon Himself the punishment that we deserved (Rom 5:6-10; 2 Cor 5:21). This is how much Christ loved us, and how He exercised the authority given to Him by God!

Scripture requires a husband to love and serve his wife and children in that same Christ-like spirit of servanthood and self-sacrifice (Eph 5:25). This can at times be very difficult, since we are still people in the process of being shaped into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). We often fall short of Christ's ideal model. We need much encouragement, prayer and effort to be a husband that fulfills Christ's standard.

But *remember*: a husband has the wisdom, power and grace of God abundantly available to him! God commands us to do only what *He will make possible through His grace*. God commands husband to love their wives in a Christ-like way; **BUT He also provides everything a husband needs in order to fulfill that command!** A husband needs only to turn to the Lord daily, and ask for and receive what he needs from the Lord.

## HEAD OF THE WIFE

Ephesians 5:23 states that "the husband is head of the wife." The word "head" should not be interpreted in a hierarchical way. In other words, men are not superior to women, nor are women inferior to men. Rather, the word "head" in this verse signifies source and nourisher of life. Christ gave Himself for the Church (Eph 5:25) and is now working to bring the Church to her full potential (vs. 26, 27). So, too, should the Christian husband imitate Christ. The husband as head is not to domineer or suppress his wife. Instead, the husband is to serve the best interests of his wife. He should lead and encourage her development and growth so that she becomes all that God desires her to be. That is true, biblical "headship".

The original Greek word used for “submit” (Eph 5:22) supports this view of life-giving and supportive headship. The word is *hupotasso*. Its root meaning is a military term, “*to draw up in order of battle; to form, array or marshal both troops and ships*”. The word implies soldiers set up in proper order under a commanding officer. It is not about superiority or inferiority; rather, it is about each person fulfilling his or her appointed role for the good of all.

This is not only how a husband and wife (and family) should function. It is also how the Body of Christ is to function (Eph 4:11-16; 1 Cor 12:4-27). Each member serves the other, supplying what the Spirit has appointed them to give, with God as Lord over all.

## **SUBMISSION: FOUNDATION OF A HUSBAND’S AUTHORITY**

How can a husband be a source and nourisher of life”? Most would assume that the first and primary role of headship is authority – but it is not! For the Christ-like husband, the first part of headship is submission.

*“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 first step in fulfilling the biblical role of a husband is to receive and **submit to Christ’s headship** in your personal life. The only way for a husband to be a truly effective head of his wife and children is to live and function in daily surrender to Christ.

Christ’s authority while on earth began with His submission to God (John 5:19, 30; 12:49, 50; 14:10). Christ continues as Lord of the Church, fulfilling God the Father’s will until the consummation of the Church age (1 Cor 15:24-28).

Christ’s servant role is the model for the husband’s role in his family. Just as Christ’s authority comes from His submission to God, **so a husband’s authority grows out of his submission to Christ.**

As mentioned previously, the issue of headship and submission does not in any way imply superiority and inferiority. Otherwise Christ, Who is submitted to God the Father, would be inferior. But this cannot be because Christ is fully God, just as our heavenly Father is fully God.

Christ serves the Church as its Head and Source of Life. Likewise, the husband is to serve the well being of his family. The Christian husband

exercises authority over his wife and children as a personal representative of Christ. This great privilege of headship carries with it great responsibility.

The husband is to provide loving understanding, self-sacrificing, patient, God-honoring leadership to his family. As he prayerfully leads his family, he cannot follow his own fleshly desires. Instead, the husband is to sensitively and obediently follow God's will – then, with grace, apply the principles of God's Word in his family.

This requires a husband's obedience to God from his heart, in everything from daily activities to big decisions – *even when he doesn't want to obey God or His Word!* True biblical headship requires that a husband first surrender his will to God's will. Even Jesus did this in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-44; Mark 14:32-36).

The more completely a husband is submitted to the Lord and His will, the more effective he will be as a husband and leader. He will become more sensitive to the Holy Spirit. He will have more fruit of the Spirit evident in his life (Gal 5:22, 23; Eph 5:8-10). He will be more Christ-like in everything he does. As a husband submits to the Lord, he takes on more of the character of Christ in his own life.

## **THE NEED FOR PRAYERFUL HEADSHIP**

God has established His order for marriage: the husband is to provide Christ-like headship and his wife is to submit to (come under) his loving authority (Eph 5:22-33). This is the order God has ordained, and it is the only order God honors and supports. It is simple in concept, yet challenging to practice every day in marriage!

At times, things may be difficult between a husband and wife. The husband may become selfish or uncaring in his role as head. Or the wife may be reluctant to submit to her husband's authority. [Note: "The Biblical Role Of A Christian Wife" (page 30) instructs wives on true, biblical submission.]

For the husband whose wife is unwilling or reluctant to submit, the first thing he should do is pray. A husband should pray for his wife, and seek for God's wisdom, grace and patience. God may bring correction to the husband for an improper attitude or desire. Or the Holy Spirit may bring conviction and change to the wife's heart. Prayer frees God to work in you, your marriage

and your spouse! Prayer is always the first thing to do when there is conflict in a marriage.

Likewise, when the wife submits to her husband's authority in faith, patience and trust in God, it is God Who takes responsibility for the husband. As the wife does what is right in God's order for marriage, God is free to work in her, her husband and the marriage (see 1 Peter 3:1, 2).

God does not expect husbands and wives to accomplish His order by their own striving. God established the order for marriage. Thus, He will make available all His grace, strength, wisdom, patience and love to any couple desiring to live in obedience to Him.

## WHAT HEADSHIP PROVIDES

When a husband provides Christ-like headship to his family, with a heart of service and sacrifice, God can use him to accomplish His purposes.

## HEADSHIP BUILDS UP AND EDIFIES

A husband's Christ-like headship will edify and build up the members of his family. His words and actions should model the love and encouragement of Christ.

As a husband honors his wife and treats her with courtesy and respect, the children learn the principles of godly headship. A husband's love for his wife helps release her to respect, love and trust him in return. She will also more readily submit to his leadership.

A Christ-like husband also understands the importance of his part in raising the children in the *"discipline and instruction of the Lord"* (Eph 6:4, nas). The Lord has placed *both* a father and mother in the home. They are to *both* act as the Lord's hands and voice to teach and train the children He has given them. *Disciplining* and *instructing* children as the Lord would do is an essential part of the husband's role in edifying the family. The training of children is not to be left only to the mother. The husband is required by the Lord to take part in the process (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21).

Remember, husbands: The Lord does not strike us in anger; instead He lovingly corrects and teaches us. If we do not respond, He may also use firm but loving discipline to correct us. But He is always patient and wise. He does

not provoke us to anger (Eph 6:4) or use unkind words or abuse us. Christ's authority always has an element of gentleness (Ps 18:35; Matt 11:29; Gal 5:23; Eph 4:2). He always affirms His love and acceptance of us – even “*while we were still sinners*” (Rom 5:8). This is the model for how we are to love, instruct and discipline our children.

## HEADSHIP GIVES DIRECTION AND GUIDANCE

The headship of a Christian husband will also give direction and guidance to his family. In order to do this, a husband *must* be submitted and sensitive to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Through his obedience to the Word and surrender to Christ's lordship, the husband is equipped and enabled to set godly and practical priorities for his family.

A husband must be flexible. Sometimes he needs to coax and encourage; at other times he must command. But he does *all* in order to direct and center his family upon Christ.

Certainly, a husband will not have all the wisdom or good ideas for his family. His wife, children and the counsel of others will also contribute to what is good for his family. But the husband must consider all this input, and prayerfully determine what is best for his family to do under the guidance of the Word and the Holy Spirit.

A good husband should not have to make every decision or direct every detail in his home. His wife should help manage the home; that is right and proper according to Scripture (Prov 31:10-31; 1 Tim 5:14). In a well-ordered home, the wife will contribute a great deal to the function of the home. But a husband must guard against neglecting his responsibility to give sensible direction and help. He must never let his wife perform all the tasks and carry the entire burden for the home and children.

A husband's neglect of responsibility can happen if he is gone too much away from home. Though it may even be ministry responsibilities that cause his absence, this is neither right nor scriptural.

The husband's *first priority* is his relationship with God. His next priority is his relationship with his wife and children. His marriage and family come *before* his ministry responsibilities or his job. A good husband does, of course, need to work to provide for his family (1 Tim 5:8). But he must also take the time to love and care for his wife, and instruct his children in the home. Neglecting a

wife and children for ministry in the church is NOT according to God's plan or the principles of Scripture. A Christ-like husband will work hard to properly balance his time among all of his God-given responsibilities.

## **PERFECT MODELS OF HEADSHIP**

The Spirit-led husband will serve his family by humbly accepting the privilege and responsibility of headship in his home. He will make every effort to provide for the needs of his family: spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically and socially. He will use his God given authority to teach, direct, encourage, plan for and serve his family.

God is our perfect model of fatherhood; Christ is our perfect model of a husband. They both gave Their all and Their best for us; a godly husband must do the same for his family.

## **THE GREATEST LEGACY:**

### **SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP**

Most of what you have already read in this article could fit into this category of Spiritual Leadership. Love, biblical headship and service are all ways of leading spiritually in your family. But there are still a few important things to note.

### **A HUSBAND'S ROLE AS ENCOURAGER**

It has been well stated that the role of the Christian husband is modeled after the Person, Character and Ministry of Christ. Let us look at one of the primary functions of Christ's ministry to the Church:

*“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 tiring, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:25- 27).*

Christ's example gives the husband another dear priority in marriage: encouraging his wife's spiritual development. A husband should desire his wife to have a personal relationship with the Lord that is strong, active and

growing. A godly husband will recognize that his wife's fulfillment as a woman, wife and mother will be realized only as she knows and walks with God daily.

In marriage, a husband is "one" with his wife (Eph 5:31). His words and actions can either encourage his wife's spiritual growth, or hinder it. The husband is certainly not his wife's "god" or "savior". Her heavenly Father is her God, and Jesus Christ is her Savior. But a husband can have a significant part in leading his wife spiritually.

This does not mean a wife is spiritually inferior to her husband. Women are oftentimes more sensitive to spiritual things than men are. Women have spiritual gifts and ministry capabilities, just as men do. Both men and women are spiritual beings; both are created for relationship with God.

## HONORING THE WIFE

*"Husbands, likewise, dwell with them [wives] 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).*

In the day when Peter wrote these words, women were considered inferior to men. In both pagan cultures and heathen religions, women had no rights and were unimportant except as child-bearers and laborers.

Christ's life and teachings completely reversed this. With the entrance of Christianity, women were now considered equal with men in terms of salvation and relationship with God (Gal 3:28). It was now recognized that, like men, women have ministry gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church (Acts 21:9; see also Joel 2:28, 29 with Acts 2:17,18). Wives are described in the Bible as *"heirs together (with the husband) of the grace of life"* (1 Pet 3:7); this places women at an equal level spiritually with men. This is still true today.

Unfortunately, some try to cite the *"weaker vessel"* portion of this verse in an attempt to make women appear morally or intellectually inferior. The word "weaker", however, refers only to lesser physical strength and thus greater vulnerability of the wife. Husbands are instructed to *"dwell with them with understanding"*, because wives are less strong physically and thus more vulnerable.

Husbands are further commanded to “*give honor to the wife*”. A wife is a valuable gift from the Lord, and should be considered more precious than riches or fine jewels (Prov 31:10). A husband should value his wife, and reserve a special place of honor and love for her alone in his heart. A husband should honor his wife by treating her with courtesy, gentleness, respect, kindness and love.

Also in 1 Peter 3:7, the term “vessel” is used to describe the wife. The biblical meaning of this term indicates *something or someone used by God for His glory*. It is important to remember that God desires to be glorified through women as well as through men. A husband needs to help his wife become a “*vessel for honor*” (2 Tim 2:21) whom God can use for His glory.

The importance of a husband’s spiritual support of his wife is clearly seen at the end of 1 Peter 3:7. If a husband does not work at understanding and honoring his wife, his prayers will “*be hindered* “. The word “hindered” means “to cut in, to interrupt, to have an obstacle thrown in the way”.

This interruption or obstacles in a man’s prayers can mean two things:

- The interference of Satan and his ways into a marriage, through the disunity that results from a husband’s failure to adequately care for his wife.
- God’s potential resistance to those who violate the principles of His Word (Ps 66:18; Prov 1:28-30, 28:9).

In addition to a husband’s prayers being hindered, his ability to spiritually lead his family will also be hampered. It is difficult for a wife and children to submit to and follow someone who does not love them or care for them. **Godly spiritual leadership begins with caring for and loving those you lead.**

This is true both in the home and in the Church. This is how our heavenly Father and His Son initiated the plan of salvation (John 3:16) and how They continue to lead us (Eph 5:1, 2). This is the only way to lead others spiritually.

## **PRACTICAL WAYS TO LEAD**

There are many ways for a husband to live each day as a spiritual leader in the home. The Word of God has hundreds of verses that describe how to love and properly relate to other people. (For example: Matt 6:14, 15; Rom 13:8; Gal 6:2; Col 3:9.) The many Scripture verses that teach us how to relate

properly to others should all be studied and practiced, especially with those in our homes.

Also, as you pray daily for your family, the Holy Spirit will show you how to be a better spiritual leader and more effectively meet the needs of your family.

In addition, here are a few simple examples of practical ways to spiritually lead in your home.

## **LEADING THROUGH INTERCESSION**

The most powerful and important thing a husband can do for his wife and children is to pray for them. *“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”* (Jas 5:16). Much is accomplished through a husband’s daily work of prayer for his family.

As a husband seeks the Lord, his heart will become more aligned with the will of God for his family. He will know better how to set priorities and determine what direction his family needs to go. He will be able to lead with joy and confidence, because he will know what God wants him to do.

Jesus is continually making intercession to God on behalf of His Bride, the Church (Heb 7:25). Jesus is praying according to the will of God for us.

Romans 8:26, 27 assures us of that, and promises that the Holy Spirit will lead us even when *“we do not know what we should pray for as we ought”* as we pray for our family.

Jesus prays continually for us. A husband will follow Christ’s example when he prays regularly for his wife and children. Though a husband may have many other ministry needs to pray for, the prayer needs and concerns of his wife and children should come first. Remember, God’s order requires that the family be of higher priority to a husband (or wife) than the ministry.

As a husband prays for his family, God will move to bring about His highest good for their lives. A husband’s prayers, and God’s work in hearts because of them, will make a great difference in ensuring a fulfilling marriage and children who walk in God’s ways.

## **LEADING THROUGH EXAMPLE**

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, *“imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”* (1 Cor 11:1). There is tremendous power in leading by example. Christ taught His disciples in this way (John 13:15; 1 Pet 2:21). The saints and leaders of the Bible also set examples we can follow (1 Cor 10:11; Heb 6:12; 13:7).

We are told in Scripture that we are to imitate good. *“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God”* (3 John 11).

It is far too easy to tell our family what they should do, but fail to show them how to do it by our example. Yes, a husband needs to teach, instruct and encourage from God’s Word. But he must not just “preach”; **he must also live the truth by example to his family.**

It is especially harmful to children when a parent says one thing, but does something quite different. The Bible calls this “hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1; 1 Pet 2:1). Children become confused about what is expected of them. Should they do what they hear their parents say, or what they see their parents do? A husband’s contradictory behavior will certainly not *build* trust or respect from his wife or children.

If children see their father pray, they will learn to become praying people. If children see their father study his Bible, they, too, will understand the importance of the Word of God. If children see their father serving others with Christ’s love, they will also learn to serve others.

The Bible exhorts parents to *“train up a child in the way he should go”* (Prov 22:6). A large part of spiritually training children is in setting a godly example for them to imitate.

A husband is exhorted to model Christ-like behavior in all of his actions and relationships (Eph 5:1-7). If he will draw upon God’s grace, power and wisdom, he can truly grow in his ability to be a Christ-like example to his family.

## **LEADING THROUGH PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION**

We have learned that a husband is to set the overall priorities and direction for his family. One of the top priorities is to lead the family spiritually through very practical means.

Deuteronomy 6:6, 7 gives some insight as to how this can be accomplished: *“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”*

This passage instructs us to use every opportunity, at every moment, to communicate the truth, wisdom, love and life of God to our family. This can be done through:

- Regular times of family prayer and Bible reading. Encourage each family member to participate in some way. Even small children can pray or recite a small portion of Scripture. Everyone can join in a worship song together. All will grow in grace and faith as they learn to minister, share and pray.
- Praying together at meal times or before bed;
- Memorizing Bible verses as a family;
- Receiving communion together at home;
- Reminding our children often of God’s great love for them as we give them a hug.

Even in the normal course of daily life there will be many opportunities to communicate God’s love and truth to family members. A husband can:

- Pray with and for his wife each morning;
- Pray with the children as they leave for school, or for a need they might have;
- Talk to his children about God’s love for them, and His great plans for their lives;
- Tell them some of the fascinating stories of Scripture, or of a miracle God has done in his life or in another’s life. Testimonies are a powerful way to build your family’s faith!

A husband should pray and ask the Holy Spirit for creative ways to communicate the love and truth of God to his family. He can ask the Lord to help him become an effective spiritual leader in his home. God *will* answer!

## CONCLUSION

Becoming a godly and spiritually mature man is never an easy task. The demands of ministry or a job, stress, fatigue, personal weakness or lack of discipline often conspire to defeat a man's best intentions.

Yet there is no higher calling or greater privilege for a Christian husband than to shepherd the "flock" that God has given him in his wife and children. As great as the task may seem, God's grace is sufficient even in weakness (2 Cor 12:9). What seems impossible with man is possible with God, for you can confidently say: *"I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me"* (Phil 4:13).

Even if you feel that you have failed in your responsibilities as a husband, *don't give up!* It is never too late to start again because God's mercies are fresh and new every day (Lam 3:22, 23). If we confess our failure and inadequacy to Him, He is quick to forgive us and to help us begin again (Ps 51:10; 1 John 1:9).

Husband, be assured that God has made available to you everything you need to have a marriage and home that is filled with His presence, joy, love and blessing. You have been charged with a great and wonderful responsibility – and opportunity – to represent the Lord to your family, and to care for them as He would. Receive this charge with joy, and receive from the Lord all that you need to accomplish it in His strength and power. Amen!

## THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF A CHRISTIAN WIFE

### HIGH STANDARDS

"Who can find a virtuous wife?" asks the writer of Proverbs 3. This eloquent chapter of the Bible is commonly referenced as the standard for the Christian wife. It clearly outlines how to live as a godly wife and is worthy of repeated reading and studying. This high standard for womanhood was penned by King Lemuel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But this chapter does not contain a *man's* lofty notions of the "ideal woman". It instead contains biblical

truths that were taught to the king by *his mother*, a woman who apparently understood about living virtuously (Prov 31:1).

It is important to remember that the truths taught in Proverbs 31 are intended as *inspiring goals* for a woman. They represent what is possible for a woman and wife to accomplish over a *lifetime*. No woman could possibly do and be everything outlined in Proverbs 31 all in the same season of her life. But this chapter does help a woman to see what is possible to achieve in her lifetime if she applies diligence, work, prayer, godly wisdom and God's great grace and help.

Proverbs 31 describes a woman who takes good care of her household, has a right relationship with her husband, can handle business matters, works hard, is physically fit, serves the needy, is wise in her decisions, and more. This can seem like a difficult, even impossible, model for a woman and wife to follow.

But remember: The commandments of the Lord "*are not burdensome*" (1 John 5:3). The guidelines of Proverbs 31 are not rigid rules, intended to make a woman feel weighed down with guilt or failure about her inability to perform every task outlined. Instead, the truths of Proverbs 31 teach what is possible for a wife to fulfill when she lives her life in yielded submission to God and obedience to His loving commands. She *can* live on a path of continual growth as a godly, productive and virtuous woman, "*through Christ who strengthens*" her (Phil 4:13).

But how does a woman begin on this path to becoming a godly and effective wife? What are the foundational biblical truths she needs to understand before attempting to apply the practical truths of Proverbs 31?

## **FULFILLING GOD'S PURPOSE**

Every Christian woman should desire to please the Lord and fulfill God's purpose for her life. However, she may not understand what God's purpose is for her life. She may even be afraid she has somehow missed what God has for her, wondering whether or not she is properly using her time, energy and gifts.

A faithful disciple of the Lord – man or woman – would never, want to walk in willful disobedience to God's plans for them. But if a woman does not understand the priorities God has set for her, she may end up going down a wrong path that takes her far away from God's will for her life.

Thus, it is important for every Christian woman, wife and mother to understand what the Bible teaches about God's priorities for women.

## WOMAN'S CREATED PURPOSE

First of all, it is important to remember that the creation of the female was very much in God's plan for mankind. This is seen in Genesis 1:27: "*So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*" It took the creation of both male and female to adequately reflect the image and glory of God.

Thus, a primary purpose for *both* a man and a woman is to be a vessel that brings glory and honor to God (2 Tim 2:21). They are *both* to reflect the image of God (as was seen in the previous article), and live as examples of His great love and redemption (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).

Thus, a Christian woman's first priority is to live in a way that honors and brings glory to the Lord (1 Cor 6:19, 20). This can be accomplished only through daily prayer and fellowship with God – and by learning and obeying God's instructions for life, the Bible. Prayer and Bible study are things a woman must find time for each day. She cannot *be* or *do* all that she should without full dependence upon God for everything she needs.

All that a godly woman does should be based on her desire to love, serve and obey the Lord (Deut 6:5). A woman should not want to be a good wife only to please her husband or to gain his favorable response. This desire in a wife can fade if a husband fails or disappoints her. Likewise, a mother should not want to train her children just so others will think she has done well. She should do so because God through His Word instructs her to (Prov 22:6).

Doing all to please the Lord is not always easy, nor is it quickly accomplished. Our flesh resists obeying God and being conformed into His image (Rom 8:29; 12:1, 2). However, God has supplied all that we need to overcome our fleshly ways and choose instead to obey the Word and the Spirit of God (Rom 13:14; Gal 5:16-23; Eph 4:20-24).

One of the most powerful verses for women in all the Bible contains the words spoken to the Lord by Mary, the mother of Jesus: "*Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word ...*" (Luke 1:38).

God was requiring Mary to do a very hard thing. Yet she was willing to do whatever God asked of her. She recognized that she was a handmaiden of the Lord, and her heart was set to obey Him and serve Him.

This kind of heart is why God chose Mary for the special task of bearing the Redeemer of the world, Jesus Christ. The Bible reveals this about Mary: “*the Lord is with you*” (Luke 1:28) and “*you have found favor with God*” (Luke 1:30).

God – the One Who looks upon the hearts of people (1 Sam 16:7) – saw within Mary a heart that was completely yielded to the purposes of God. She loved God and, putting her own desires second, allowed God’s desires for her to be realized (Ps 37:4).

A godly woman recognizes the importance of wanting only what God wants. She will not hold onto her life and live only for herself (Matt 10:39). She will be willing to lay down her own desires in order to serve a much higher purpose: God’s desires and plans for her, her husband, her children and others.

Thus, the first priority for a godly woman also includes *yielding her life to God in obedience*. She is to cooperate with God’s work in her life to become a person who gives glory and honor to God through both her words and her deeds.

## THE UNMARRIED WOMAN

If a woman chooses not to marry, her first priority is still to become a yielded vessel of honor, as described above. Her second priority is to use her time and energy to serve the Lord and serve *others in ministry* (1 Cor 7:8, 27-35). Of course, she may need to have a job and provide a living for herself. But her remaining time can be devoted to serving the Lord and ministering to others.

## THE MARRIED WOMAN

The Bible contains very specific instructions for the married woman. A married woman’s priorities are different from those of an unmarried woman. After her relationship with God, *the next priority for a married woman is to care for and partner with her husband*.

Paul discussed this in his first letter to the Corinthian church: “*But she who is married cares about...how she may please her husband*” (1 Cor 7:34). Paul was reminding them that marriage was a big responsibility. It was a lifetime commitment that required much time and energy in order to be fruitful. A woman who chose to marry would have to devote much of her time to her husband.

This primary focus for a wife is again mentioned in Titus 2:4, where older women are told to “*admonish the young women to love their husbands*”. It is clear that one of a wife’s priorities would be her relationship with her husband.

## A HELPER

The Bible says that God made the male form of mankind first (Gen 2:7, 21, 22). God made provision for his needs, and gave him jobs to perform and instructions to fulfill (Gen 2:7-20).

Then God Himself said, “*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him*” (Gen 2:18). The Lord God, in His infinite wisdom and power, knew that a man could better fulfill what God required of him if he had a female partner, a “*helper*” who was like him.

A “*helper comparable*” as used in Genesis 2:18 (also “*helpmeet*” – kjV) is best defined as “someone in the same likeness to assist or aid”. Woman was the only created being with a form and likeness similar to man’s. She was given to man by God in order to assist or aid him. She was to help him in his daily work and provide him with support and companionship. The husband and wife were to partner together in the bearing and raising of children.

It is significant to note that Eve was created from the rib of Adam. She came from a bone in his side. This beautifully illustrates how a husband and wife are positioned side by side. They are to *stand alongside* each other. They are to provide help, support and encouragement for each other, in order to fulfill all that God has destined for them.

So the *second priority* for a wife – after her relationship of love and obedience to God – is to be a helper to her husband. Let us now look at specific instructions the Bible gives to a wife about how to be a good and godly helper to her husband.

# GOD'S ORDER OF AUTHORITY

One of the clearest sets of instructions for marriage is found in Ephesians 5:22-33. For the wife, there are two specific instructions in this passage. Let us look at the first one now.

*“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”* (Eph 5:22-24).

God originally created both man and woman to rule to get as partners and act as stewards of the earth that God had created. *“Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion [rule] over it.’”* (Gen 1:28)

But both man and woman chose to rebel against God's word; as a result, sin entered the world (Gen 3:1-7). It was at this time that God set in motion plan for redeeming mankind from the curse of sin and established a new order (Gen 3:8-21).

As part of this new redemptive order, God established levels of authority on earth. Before sin's entrance, God had all authority, and Adam and Eve obeyed Him willingly. There was no need for human authority to be established.

But mankind's choice to sin led to increasingly selfish and wicked behavior, which in turn led to disorder and chaos. God eventually established governments and leaders in order to maintain a righteous “rule and order on the earth until the end of the age (1 Cor 15:24).

God's order of authority began with the husband and wife. God put the husband in a position of authority over his wife (Gen 3:16). This does not mean the husband is somehow better or superior to his wife. God, in His wisdom, instructed the husband to fulfill the role of headship, to protect his wife and lead her in godliness.

The previous article on the biblical role of the husband (page 19) clearly explains how a husband is charged by God through the Scriptures to lead his wife and family in this way.

Among the things required for a man to lead in a biblical manner, he is to:

- Be the *head* of the wife (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:23)
- Provide this headship with love (Eph 5:25; Col 3:19)
- Love his wife as Christ loves the Church (Eph 5:25), with a *servant heart* and in a manner that honors and pleases the Lord
- Honor his wife and lead with understanding (1 Pet 3:7)
- Love his wife without bitterness (Col 3:19)
- Care for his wife as he would his own body (Eph 5:28, 29).

To love and serve his wife in this manner is a husband's greatest responsibility and highest privilege.

## THE TRUE MEANING OF SUBMISSION

Just as the husband is charged to love his wife as Christ loves the Church, the wife is charged to come under the husband's protective covering and receive his love and headship in the home. The wife is to *receive* – not *resist* – the headship role God has given her husband. She is to follow her husband's leadership. That is what is meant by submission (Eph 5:22).

The word “submission” is made from two Greek words: *hupo*, which means “under”, and *tasso*, which means “an orderly manner, appoint”. So the word *submission* literally means “to live in an orderly, appointed manner under headship”. When the Bible instructs a wife to submit, it means that God has appointed a wife *to* live under the leadership of her husband in a God-ordered manner.

Many women fear submission. They may think submission means they are somehow less worthy or less loved by God than a man is. Or because of abuse or mistreatment by a male authority figure, a woman may think submission is a bad thing and should be resisted.

But God understands better than we can the special way He created a woman. She is unique, and as a different makeup and role than a man. A woman is more tender and sensitive; she is “weaker” (1 Pet 3:7), which means more vulnerable to attack because of her lesser physical strength.

Thus, God provided a way for women – His daughters (2 Cor 6:18) – to be loved, cared for and protected. And He charged husbands to fulfill this role.

Sadly, many men do not understand the role God has given them as husbands. They may not properly love or care for their wives. At the same time, many women do not understand how to receive their husband's love and leadership. They may fail to encourage, support or help him. This misunderstanding of the biblical roles of husband and wife is the cause of much heartache and disillusionment in marriage.

## PUTTING ASIDE UNGODLY INCLINATIONS

God commanded the husband to love his wife; He also commanded the wife to submit to her husband. These commands are repeated several times in the Bible (Eph 5:22-28; Col 3:18,19; 1 Pet 3:1-7).

In the natural, fleshly realm, a man's first instinct is not to love someone else; it is to think of his own desires first. Thus, the Bible reminds a husband repeatedly that he is to love his wife. A godly man will choose to "crucify" his own fleshly desires (Gal 5:24), and instead obey the spiritual commands of God to love his wife.

A woman's natural, fleshly inclination is to want to control, not to submit. She was originally created to co-rule with man. But after the Fall, she was to be subject to God's order of authority, and be led by her husband. God warned her, "*your desire shall be for your husband*" (Gen 3:16). In other words, her fallen, sinful nature would desire to have the man's position of authority. So the Bible repeatedly reminds a wife to submit to her husband. A godly wife should no longer give place to her fleshly inclinations to control or resist her husband. She should instead obey God's command to submit and receive her husband's God appointed leadership in her life.

## TRUSTING IN GOD

A wife must remember that *it is God Who established the role of the husband as the authority over her*. A husband does not earn this responsibility; he is commanded by God to lead and serve his wife in this way.

When a wife resists her husband's authority, she is also resisting God's will and order. When she receives her husband's leadership and authority, she is

also receiving God's order. However, this does NOT make the husband a "god" – for he, too, is to submit to God's authority in *his* life (1 Cor 11:3; Jas 4:7).

When a wife chooses to obey God and submit to her husband – even if the husband fails in his responsibilities to the wife – God is the One Who will deal with the husband AND provide for the wife.

A good example of this is found in the story of Abraham and Sarah (Gen 12:10-20; 20:1-18). There were two instances when Abraham foolishly and fearfully lied about Sarah, and failed to protect her. Yet, Sarah still submitted, and God was the One Who stepped in to protect and help Sarah.

How was Sarah so willingly able to trust and submit to her husband? We get some insight in 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 [a term of respect, not worship], whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror."*

We see in this passage two very important qualities in Sarah's life that helped her to submit with reverence to her husband.

First, she trusted in God. Sarah obviously knew and walked with God, and she trusted Him. She believed that if God established an order of submission for her life, it must be good for her. She trusted that God's order is always best.

Secondly, Sarah was not afraid. She knew God, and did not fear what might happen if she obeyed the Lord and submitted to her husband. Sarah chose to remain under her husband's leadership. Even when, in weakness and fear, he stumbled and opened his wife up to harm, it was God Who intervened on Sarah's behalf and provided for and protected her.

In the case when a husband is not a believer who is submitted to Christ's Lordship, the wife is still encouraged to live with faith and trust in God and in submission to her husband (1 Pet 3:16). Her gracious and loving manner will be a strong testimony to her husband of God's love, grace and redeeming power in her life.

## **A LOVING PARTNERSHIP**

Biblical submission does not mean that a wife will always agree with her husband. There may be times when a wife does not agree with a decision her husband wants to make. She should be free to share her ideas, with a loving and non-critical attitude.

A wise and loving husband will take the time to listen to the advice or opinions of his wife. He will be sensitive to her concerns. He may find that she has a wiser perspective on a certain matter, and graciously acknowledge it to her. Or, he may disagree with her perspective, and lovingly and patiently explain to her the reason for his different perspective.

The Bible instructs all believers to be humble and mutually submitted to one another, never “lording” their God-given authority over another (1 Pet 5:1-7). This is also true in a godly marriage.

It is not important who is “right”. What is important is that believers – including a married couple – work toward unity and agreement. A godly and loving marriage is a partnership, in which two people are growing together as one (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5, 6). A husband and wife must have many conversations and share their thoughts openly with each other in order to come to a place of “oneness” and agreement in their marriage.

## **AN IMPORTANT NOTE**

It is important to note that a woman does not have to subject herself to harm or abuse in the name of submission; and a husband is charged never to exploit a wife’s trust or misuse his position of authority (Eph 5:25-29; 1 Pet 3:7). A godly husband will never intentionally harm his wife or family, or ask them to do anything that is contrary to the Word of God.

It is equally important to note that a loving wife, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, is precious not only to her husband (Prov 31:10, 11), but also in the sight of God (1 Pet 3:4). Even if a husband fails at times to provide loving, godly headship, a wife’s gracious attitude will still allow the testimony of Christ to be raised (1 Pet 3:1-7).

## **TRUE LIBERATION**

Submission is a difficult subject to understand. There is much abuse of this principle by those in authority; and much resistance to it by those who are to be under submission.

But remember that submission is a dear principle established by an all-loving, all-wise God. He intended for a wife to be protected and blessed by her husband's loving, Christ-like headship.

A woman's true freedom can come only through the knowledge of genuine truth (John 8:31, 32), and the application of that truth in her personal life (Jas 1:22). It is through trust in God and His order that a wife can be fully released – truly liberated – to become all that God desires her to be.

## THE BIBLICAL MEANING OF RESPECT

Ephesians 5 contains a second instruction for wives: “Let the wife see that she respects [reverences] her husband” (v.33).

The original Greek word for “*respects*” is *phobeo*, which means “revere, be in awe of, [reverential] fear”.

This does not mean a wife is to be afraid of her husband. *Phobeo* is the same kind of “fear” or reverence that we are to have of the Lord (Ps 5:7). We honor God and hold Him in high esteem, not cower because we are afraid of Him.

In the same manner, a wife is to hold her husband in high esteem and honor him as the God-appointed head of the home. A wife can submit to her husband, and obey everything he asks her to do. But if her attitude does not reflect respect or reverence for the position God has given him, she is not practicing true, godly submission.

A husband needs his wife's respect. He needs the encouragement of a wife who is supportive of his leadership. He does not need someone to mock him or criticize his every mistake; this will discourage him from becoming a good effective, loving leader in the home.

To respect or reverence her husband means a wife is to *honor the position of headship* given to him by God. A wife is to highly esteem the position God has given her husband as head, even if his behavior makes that difficult to do.

God is the One Who appoints a husband to lovingly lead his wife. If a wife does not honor and respect her husband's God-given role, she is setting herself against God's Word and will. Opposing God is a very dangerous and foolish thing for anyone to do – man or woman.

Earlier in this article it was stated that every godly person wants to do the will of God. But a woman who does not understand the biblical priorities God has given her can end up actually opposing the will of God for her and her family! That is why it is important for a woman to understand and put into practice the role God has called her to fulfill.

Respect and reverence for her husband is a priority for a wife in marriage. The model for how a Christian wife should respect and honor her husband is best seen in the way the Church is to love and honor Christ (Eph 5:24). This kind of love and respect from a wife to a husband can be shown in many ways. She can:

- serve him willingly;
- acknowledge his God-ordained place as the head;
- respond to his leadership in obedience;
- listen to him;
- love and receive him;
- praise and edify him;
- trust him;
- be unified in purpose and will with him;
- be a true helper.

As a Christian wife prays, studies her Bible and seeks the Lord, she will discover many more ways to love and respect her husband in a way that glorifies God and honors her husband.

## **BEING A MODEL OF GODLY RESPECT**

Many women have difficulty respecting their husbands. They think a husband has to first behave in a certain way or act perfectly, and then they will respect and honor him. But that is not biblical respect.

Just as a wife should not have to “earn” her husband’s love by trying to be perfect, neither should a husband have to “earn” his wife’s respect. A husband should love his wife because God has charged him to do so. In the same way, a wife should respect her husband because God has charged her to do so in His Word.

Of course, a wife should always strive to be a godly woman her husband can easily love; and a husband should work at living in a godly manner that his wife can respect. But neither a husband’s love nor a wife’s respect can be earned.

Respect is a *choice* a woman makes. She willingly decides that she will honor and respect the position of headship God has given her husband.

Respect is also reflected in a wife’s *attitude*. She must choose to speak to her husband with respect, and honor his position by supporting his leadership.

She must support him both in the home, and in public settings, with both her words and her actions.

A wife’s loving respect will be a tremendous encouragement to her husband, and will help him to lead her in a worthy manner. Her respect for him will also be a wonderful model to the children in the home. They will learn how to respect and honor the Lord and others who are in positions of authority in their lives by watching their mother respect their father.

## **GOD’S AUTHORITY IN MARRIAGE**

As a wife learns to respect her husband, she must also learn that it is not her role to correct him or shape his character. Often, a wife wants to tell her husband the things that are “wrong” with him, and what he should do to change them!

It is true that a wife knows her husband very well. She sees his flaws and knows his weaknesses. But a godly wife also understands it is NOT her place to change her husband into what she wants him to be.

Only God

- has the wisdom to know what He wants a person to become and how they can grow into all that He has for them

- truly knows His will for each person and when it is time for Him to shape or change something in a person's life
- can truly change a person from within, in a way that is lasting.

A godly wife realizes that her husband belongs to God and is under God's authority. She can respect her husband's position of headship – and God's authority over him – by *praying for her husband* every day. If she notices weakness or failure in her husband, she has the privilege and responsibility of asking the Lord to help or to convict her husband. She must then trust the Lord to work in her husband's life.

There are occasional times when a wife may – and should – sensitively give her husband helpful suggestions or constructive criticism. A wise husband will welcome his wife's loving input. However, a wife is NOT to try and control her husband's life or character.

Instead, she should encourage his strengths, and be patient and prayerful as God shapes and transforms her husband more and more into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).

(NOTE: If a husband's behavior is harmful to the wife, children or others, then a wife should seek godly counsel and help. Or if there is much strife and many problems in a marriage, then both the husband and wife should seek out godly, biblical counsel and assistance.)

A wife cannot truly respect and honor her husband by mere willpower alone – just as a husband cannot truly love his wife in his own strength. But a husband and wife are Christ's workmanship (Eph 2:8-10). The Spirit of God is at work in every Christian, building them up and sanctifying them *as they yield to His work*. God has provided everything a man or woman needs to be a godly spouse. They need only pray for God to shape them more and more into His image, in order to love, honor and respect their spouse as they should. This process takes daily effort over a lifetime, but is well worth the effort required to enjoy a godly marriage and family.

## **PARENTING: A VITAL ROLE**

We have now examined the first two priorities God gives to a woman through His Word. The first priority for a woman is her relationship and walk with God.

This, along with Bible study and prayer, will help her to become a woman whose words and actions bring glory to God and blessing to others.

**The second priority for a wife is to be a helper to her husband.** She must love and care for her husband, receive with submission his God given role of headship, honor and respect him, and be a good partner to him in life and ministry.

A woman needs to take the necessary time each day to work on these first two priorities. But what is the next priority for a godly woman?

We find it in Titus 2:4: “*Admonish the young women to love their husbands, to **love their children**...*”.

**A wife’s third priority (if she has children) is to love and care for her children.** According to Scripture, both she and her husband must share this responsibility in order to properly raise and train their children (Gen 1:27; Deut 6:6,7; Prov 22:6; Eph 6:1-4).

When children are young, they require much time and attention. A wife might feel she has time for nothing else but caring for the children. ‘But she must also try to maintain her other priorities: giving time each day to her relationship with God, and to her relationship with her husband.

There are serious consequences when a wife begins to place her children above her husband in importance. (For an example of the problems this creates, read the story of Isaac and Rebekah in Genesis 24-28, especially 25:28 and 27:1-46.)

The same can be true if a husband begins to neglect his wife because of long hours at work or in ministry. The wife, the marriage and the family will suffer.

There is no other human relationship as important as the husband and wife relationship. BOTH the husband and wife must give their relationship the time and attention necessary to keep it healthy and to maintain unity.

In addition, they both must devote time to raising and training their children in the ways of the Lord. Children need love, care, feeding, nurturing, training and discipline to grow up to be godly and productive adults. Both the husband and wife are charged by God to devote themselves to this privilege and responsibility.

To properly raise children in a biblical manner, parents should include the following:

- teach, train and nurture children (Deut 4:9; 6:6, 7; Prov 22:6; Eph 6:4)
- sanctify children to God through prayer and worship (Job 1:5; Luke 2:22, 23)
- include children in worship times (Josh 8:35; Neh 12:43; Luke 2:41-46)
- restrain children from evil (1 Sam 3:13; 1 Tim 3:4,12)
- chasten/ discipline children (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 29:15, 17; Heb 12:6)
- love their children (Prov 13:24; Titus 2:4)
- be forgiving toward children (Luke 15:20-24; Eph 4:32)
- provide a godly example to children (2 Chr 26:4 2 Tim 1:5)

Godly parenting cannot be accomplished with only occasional interaction with one's children. Deuteronomy 6:6, 7 makes it clear that properly raising your children takes daily conversation, training and discipline. Opportunities arise every day for parents to communicate God's love, His Word and His plans for their children. Parents must be present with their children and available to them in order to adequately train and raise them.

## TO EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON

As children grow in godliness and as a marriage matures, both require less time to manage. What then is a fourth priority for a Christian wife, according to Scripture?

When a husband and wife are *each day* devoting themselves to God, their marriage, and their children, and when a husband is providing for his family – what is next? After these priorities are being met, the husband and wife can then minister to the Body of Christ.

Often times, leaders in the church get this confused. They think they must minister to everyone else in the church first. Then, if they have any time or energy left, they might spend a little time with their spouse or children. This is NOT God's order for the married Christian!

Ministry is very important, yes. Christians are to be light and salt to the world (Matt 5:13-16), participate in church (Heb 10:25), and share the Gospel with others (Acts 1:8; 1 Pet 3:15). But ministry is not to *replace* the family priorities God has made clear in the Bible for both a husband and wife.

Ministry to others must be balanced with the very important marriage and family responsibilities already given by God in His Word. As stated previously, the orderly home life and right relationships of the ministering person must come before leadership and ministry (1 Tim 3:1-7).

## KEEPING YOUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

God does not change (Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8). He has already made clear in the Bible His plan for a husband and wife. **God will never call someone to do something that does not agree with what He has already said in the Bible!** If a man or woman thinks God has told them to do something, and it does not agree with the Bible, it is NOT from God. God's Word is complete and final, and is not to be changed or added to (Ps 119:89; Isa 40:8; Rev 22:18, 19).

Today, Christian men and women are often tempted to abandon their God-given roles in order to pursue things they perceive as more "exciting" or "important". Many people in the world around them are abandoning their spouse for someone else, or replacing their role as parents with their work outside the home. Even ministers can become too busy serving the church to take proper care of their families.

Christians must not become deceived by or follow the unbiblical standards that they see in others. If they do, their marriages and families will suffer.

God has made very clear in His Word what His priorities are for a Christian husband and wife. If a husband and wife truly desire all that God has for them, they will follow what He has already instructed them to do in His Word. When they are faithful and obedient in the responsibilities God has already given, then God will release more privilege and responsibility to them (Matt 25:21; 1 Tim 3:8-13).

God honors faithfulness and a heart that is yielded to Him. He looks for those who are obedient and completely devoted to Him and then chooses to do great things through them (2 Chr 16:9).

## ENCOURAGEMENT FOR WIVES

There are many passages in the Bible that give practical instruction for living as a godly, loving wife and a fruitful Christian. Take time to read and study the passages below:

Deuteronomy 6:6, 7; Proverbs 14:1; 31:10-31; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Philippians 2:14, 15; 1 Timothy 3:11,12; Titus 2:1-5.

Add to this list other Bible passages you find helpful for instruction in being a godly wife and mother. You might each week choose an area of your life that needs improvement, and then put into practice the godly principles you learn from Scripture.

If you feel you are not living as the Word instructs in an area of your life, PRAY. Ask the Lord to help you – He certainly will answer! A wife may also want to talk with her husband about the things in her life she wants God to change. She can ask her husband to pray with and for her. There is immense power when a husband and wife agree together in prayer (see Matthew 18:19). Prayer together also promotes unity and a heightened sensitivity to each other's needs.

Remember, God has provided all the strength, grace, wisdom and help you need to be a godly wife and mother. If you feel weary or discouraged, remind yourself of these truths: *"I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me"* (Phil 4:13) and *"Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart"* (Gal 6:9).

## **FULFILLING GOD'S PLAN FOR YOU**

For both men and women, their relationship to God is their first priority. If they choose to be married, their spouse becomes their next priority. If they choose to have children, taking the time to care for and train their children becomes their next priority. A man must also provide for his family by consistently working. A husband, wife and older children must also be available to serve in the church and to share the Gospel. All other things in a married couple's life must come behind these important priorities established by God in *His Word*. Do you want to fulfill God's highest plan for you? Do you want to be sure you are fulfilling God' will? Then live your life according to God's priorities – which He has already revealed in His Word and you will be set on a pathway to fulfill all that God has planned for you!