

# Husband and Wife:

The Imitation of Christ

Dr. Steven Waterhouse

Westcliff Press  
[www.webtheology.com](http://www.webtheology.com)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS BY STEVEN WATERHOUSE

*Not By Bread Alone; An Outlined Guide to Bible Doctrine*

*Strength For His People; A Ministry For the Families of the Mentally Ill*

*Blessed Assurance; A Defense of the Doctrine of Eternal Security*

*What Must I Do To Be Saved?*

*The Bible's Definition of Saving Faith*

*Life's Tough Questions*

*Holy Matrimony; The Image of God in the Family*

*Outside the Heavenly City;*

*Abortion in Rome and the Early Church's Response*

*Jesus and History; How We Know His Life and Claims*

*Depression Recovery; According to the Bible*

*Messianic Prophecy*

*Suffering; Why Would a Good God Allow Evil and Pain?*

*Jesus, Miracles and History*

*Bible Counsel for Raising Children*

*A Biblical Look at Unborn Children*

(All Available for FREE DOWNLOAD at [www.webtheology.com](http://www.webtheology.com))

---

Published by Westcliff Press - First Edition 2012. Copyright 2012 by Steven W. Waterhouse

All rights reserved. This book or portions thereof may be reproduced or retransmitted without written permission from the publisher only if attributed to the author and without alteration.

Westcliff Press, P.O. Box 1521, Amarillo, TX 79105. [www.webtheology.com](http://www.webtheology.com)  
5300 Amarillo Blvd. West, Amarillo, TX 79106 (Office)  
email: [westcliff@amaonline.com](mailto:westcliff@amaonline.com) Phone 806-359-6362

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE, Copyright The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995

Printed in the United States of America

## Preface

This booklet is an excerpt from *Holy Matrimony: The Image of God in the Family*. This booklet, as well as, the complete book are available for free download from both web sites: [www.webtheology.com](http://www.webtheology.com). and [westcliffbiblechurch.org](http://westcliffbiblechurch.org). The author also welcomes communication from anyone wanting to use God's Word to build a strong marriage.

We must all go to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with our needs and place faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. My ultimate goal is to draw readers to the Lord Jesus and to the great wisdom of Scripture. To the degree that a human leader can help, I welcome contacts from anyone in need.

Steven Waterhouse



### **The Biblical Equality of the Sexes**

An imbalanced washing machine shakes, thuds and rattles in an annoying way. Lack of balance relative to gender studies in churches sometimes wobbles the machine to the left by denying a wife should submit to her husband. Sometimes by clumsy communication the church machine wobbles to the right. One might hear a poor sermon where a husband's authority comes across like a chest-beating gorilla or a overbearing thug with a foot on a wife's neck. Usually, the problem on the right is just poor communication style. If, however, a speaker or author should actually assert that men and women are not equal, this is a Biblically false doctrine.

The Bible contains balance. Christians must learn to communicate the value given to women in Scripture. At the same time, we must use prudent words in balancing the truth that a wife should submit to her own husband. With efforts towards balance, God is honored and more in society would listen.

God's Word teaches that male and female are equal. The matter of a wife's submission to her own husband is a related but still different topic than gender equality. By voluntarily entering into a marriage covenant with me, Mrs. Waterhouse took the risk to trust my leadership. However, this has absolutely nothing to do with men in general. She has no obligation to the authority of the man next door or male readers of this book. Furthermore, while subordinate to me in the position and work of the family, she possesses equal value to me in person and worth.

The Bible does teach a wife should yield to her own husband. This point is actually irrelevant to the topic of gender equality. Obviously and categorically the Bible does not teach that all women are subordinate to all men.

A single woman has no obligation for any special respect to any man. She has not chosen to enter any marriage covenant. If she does find a man she loves and trusts, submission to him alone arises by choice. Even then she remains equal in value in terms of person and worth.

### The Image of God

The creation account teaches that both male and female possess the image of God. "God created man [humans] in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created *them*" (Genesis 1:27). Genesis 5:1-2 defines "man" (human) as both "male" and "female." Both possess the likeness of God.

The image of God in both male and female means that women have equal and infinite value. Men and women are equally sinful and depraved.<sup>1</sup> Christ died on the cross and offers salvation by faith equally. In eternity men and women who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ will both enjoy the heavenly city.

### God as Mother

Those who translate the Scripture into modern languages have a sacred obligation not to tamper with gender relative to God. *He* is God. The Persons within the Trinity are *Father* and *Son* and Holy Spirit. The Lord's Prayer must remain, "Our *Father* who art in heaven" "Still, God possesses feminine traits. This comes as no surprise since both male and female constitute humanity made in God's image.

One of the great attributes of God is *compassion*. Along with God's nature of being loyal to a covenant relationship, the same passages emphasize His "compassion." "The LORD, the LORD God, *compassionate* and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness (i.e., loyal-love to covenant relationships) and truth" (Ex. 34:6, see also Psalm 103:8). While males can and should have compassion, primarily this is a feminine trait. The Hebrew word for "compassion" relates to the Hebrew word for "womb." This fascinating word used of God's attributes stresses the female and the maternal. The image of God within the human race includes traits that emphasize women's nature as in a mother's compassionate love.

---

<sup>1</sup> In a theological sense, depravity does not mean every one is as wicked possible. It means we are all equally hopeless in terms of solving our own sin problem. No one, male or female, has any hope of salvation without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

God the *Son* nourishes and cherishes the church (Ephesians 5:29). The Greek word for cherish was chosen by the ancient rabbis to translate a reference to a mother bird covering her eggs or covering the little birds with her feathers (Deuteronomy 22:6 LXX<sup>2</sup>).

The Apostle Paul compared himself to a mother "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children" (1 Thessalonians 2:7). The Greek word chosen here relates to feminine traits (1 Kings 1:2, 4 LXX; Job 39:14 LXX).

References in the above paragraphs teach that Christian men, as husbands or church leaders, are supposed to have some feminine characteristics. The Bible teaches both that woman originated from man (Adam's rib) and that every man originates from woman (1 Corinthians 11:12).<sup>3</sup> Evidently, in the Judeo-Christian world-view, even the ideal for manhood involved an appreciation and inclusion of feminine traits. Men remain men but renewal from the fall into the image of God involves some feminine traits because they are also part of God's nature.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Because Greek became a universal language in the centuries before Christ Jewish scholars in Alexandria translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. This translation is called the Septuagint. Because it is said 70 rabbis worked on the project, the abbreviation for the translation is LXX. This translation helped dispersed Jews for whom Hebrew became a secondary language. Today, it helps Bible scholars with word definitions.

<sup>3</sup> The genders are interdependent, males and females need each other.

<sup>4</sup> Some non-Christian cultures have long regarded Judeo-Christian models as "weak." A contemporary perspective might be that church participation is for women, children, and weak men. Pagans with a barbarian mindset have long detested humility as a virtue and tenderness as weak. The ideal can become a violent and murderous rampage with little mercy. Jews and Christians can make first rate warriors, but the Bible commands a reflection of God's nature in the ideal of a father as "Abba, daddy." Humility that reminds us we desperately need God actually creates greater courage and strength in life, including battle. God's "compassion" and His tenderness "to nurture" and cherish is perhaps reflected more in women. However, men who imitate God also display these virtues. Men should not become feminine but do need to become civilized gentlemen. Any "new age" return to pagan ways will not be good for men, women, or children. Men who reflect God's

### The Lord Jesus Christ and Women

The world seems oblivious to the debt it owes Christianity relative to the status of women. The Old Testament made the point. Male and female are both in the image of God (Genesis 1:27, 5:1-2). A good wife has infinite worth (Proverbs 18:22, 19:14, 31:10-31). Deborah was a political, even a military leader (Judges 4-5). Huldah was a prophetess respected and needed by both king and high priest (2 Kings 22:8-20). The books of Ruth and Esther gave God's view on the value of women. Judaism honors its matriarchs: Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel. Compared to the surrounding pagan world the Hebrew Scripture elevated women. Still, not everyone applied such truth.

The disciples were shocked that the Lord would converse with the woman at the well (John 4:27). To deal with a Samaritan (heretic, half-breed in their thinking) was bad enough, but Jesus talked with a woman and probably even drank from the same vessel. This was improper manners and quite disgusting.<sup>5</sup> Ancient rabbinic quotes reflect attitudes towards women at the time of Christ.

A man shall not talk with a woman in the street, not even with his own wife.<sup>6</sup>

Blessed Art Thou, O Lord Our God, King of the Universe, who hast not made me a woman.<sup>7</sup>

---

image more fully also develop God's tender side. Those who hope for Christianity to decline will not find any blessing if a generation of men arises with the manners and actions of Vikings, Huns, or Mongols.

<sup>5</sup> One Sunday the author gave a sermon in a rural African church. The rumors were that one particular woman had been stigmatized because she was unable to have children. Yet, this same woman was caring for six orphans whose parents had died from AIDS. John 4 was a perfect choice for a text. Not only did the message apply to tribal hatred (modern Jew-Samaritan feelings) and evangelize, but the text asserts Jesus's concern for women in contrast to many in His own culture.

<sup>6</sup> Leon Morris, *Studies on the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 219, fn. 8.



Knowledge of such odd customs is vital to a true picture of the Lord's behavior by contrast. The Lord balanced His teaching ministry displaying equal interest in women. "For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:50). The Lord balanced the story of a lost sheep with a woman sweeping the house for a lost coin (Luke 15:4-10). Both men in the field and women grinding at the mill must be ready for His Second Coming (Matthew 24:40-41). In the meantime, the kingdom of heaven is both like a man sowing seed (Matthew 13:24-30) or fishing (13:47-50) but also a woman hiding leaven in flour (13:33). The Lord's attention to and interest in women reflects an astounding difference to the culture of His time. The gospel authors who selected such comments and stories for inclusion indirectly show their value of women. Dr. Luke probably attended many women and children either in childbirth or sickness. Bible scholars have long noted Luke's interest in women and children in the accounts of both Luke and Acts.<sup>8</sup>

Modern feminists who disrespect Christianity actually undermine the world-view that has elevated women. Efforts to weaken Christianity cannot possibly improve future treatment of and views toward women. In all fairness, some Christians have been poor models or have communicated the Bible's views on women with bad attitudes and poor words. Women of the world are in debt to the Lord Jesus Christ, Dr. Luke, and Matthew, Mark and John.<sup>9</sup> Oddly, given the abuse he

---

<sup>7</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *The Role of Women in the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press 1978), p.8.

<sup>8</sup> Luke mentions 13 women not mentioned in the other gospels. In the book of Acts he records the raising of Tabatha (Dorcus) with the story of Cornelius (Acts 9-10). Rhoda forgot to open the door with Peter outside of Mary's house (Acts 12:12-17). Lydia was the first convert in Europe (Acts 16:14ff.). Since Priscilla's name comes first, she is likely the one who privately and respectfully informed Apollos there were some problems with his sermon (Acts 18:24-26).

<sup>9</sup> Spiritual blindness prevents many from giving any credit for societal blessings arising from Christian influence in world history. Some, however, can be convinced that Christianity has elevated women.

receives, the Apostle Paul gives the clearest statement on gender equality.

#### Paul on Women

The Apostle Paul wrote most (but not all) texts that command a wife to submit to her **own** husband (e.g. Ephesians 5:22). The Greek word *ōwnō* is *idios* from which we also derive *idiosyncrasy*. A wife has an obligation to submit to her *ōwnō* husband as a unique relationship exclusive to her husband. However, Paul also gave a clear statement on overall gender equality in Galatians 3:28. *ō . . . there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Viewed as an entire classification, men and women are equal. They share equally in spiritual need due to sin. They share equally in the offer to trust in Christ for salvation. After faith in Christ, they share equally in union with Christ and will share an eternal destiny.

#### The Importance of Gender Equality

The Bible's position on gender equality is actually a different topic than gender roles within marriage or church life. Balance on the topic casts a spotlight on the important contribution Christianity has made to the status and treatment of women.

Also, it is vital that married men understand the value of women. While a wife should submit to her own husband in position and work within the family, she remains of equal and infinite worth in her person. The role of helper means the poor guy needs help! The role of leader in a home is not that of a tyrant, for the Bible commands husbands to love as Christ loves, to understand their wives, and to communicate. The Bible's role for any leader is that of a master who is a servant. Christians in any leadership role in life are supposed to make decisions without selfishness and in the best interest of those under their authority. Careful communication of Biblical ideas about gender equality and a true balance of male authority in the home allows for less confusion in society and stronger marriages.

## God's Plan for a Husband

### The Imitation of Christ's Love for His Bride: The Church

What does the word "love" mean in the statement, "I love chocolate"? In high school days, I went to a rock concert purely by accident. Our senior class went to an amusement park and discovered our trip had led us to an event involving the band at the top of the charts. After the first song the "star" invited women backstage afterwards to have some "love." Even the unsaved girls from our rural high school said they were frightened and left.

In the sentence, "I love chocolate" the definition of love is "consumption." When I consume chocolate it gratifies me. Everyone talks of the need for love, but not everyone has the same definition in mind. In the worst cases, "I love you" means "I will use and consume you for myself."

The primary Biblical command for husbands is "love your wives just as Christ also loved the church" (Ephesians 5:25, see also Col. 3:19). God the Son is the ideal model for husbands. Good husbands imitate Christ in His relationship to the Church. His example of love could not be more different than consuming another for selfish purposes.

Four Words for Love: The Greek language has four main words for love. *Eros* refers to sexual love. While the New Testament does not use this word, the Bible certainly blesses sexual love within the marriage covenant.

A second Greek word refers to parental instinct, the normal love of a family bond such as maternal love. Paul used a negation of this word (*astorgos*) to say that many people in Roman Empire times had lost normal family affection (Romans 1:31, "unloving", see also KJV). He also predicted in the last times humanity will lose normal family love (2 Timothy 3:3, "unloving", see also KJV). Yes, parents can be cold to their own children and siblings can hate each other. However, God's Word classifies this as abnormal psychology. Normally, people love their children, their parents and their siblings.

The next two words for love are *philos* and *agape*. Both of these concern love between couples.

#### Tender and Emotional Love:

Many who reject Christ would misdefine love as consumption. Yet, it is possible for even unbelievers to rise higher in their concept of love. Often when people use the word "love" they mean a good feeling. They have affection for another person based on tender and warm feelings. In a romantic sense their hearts throb in each other's presence. In a friendship they enjoy each other's company.

The Greek word for love based on feeling is *philos*. The New Testament contains about 94 uses among an amazing 26 different forms. They come down into English in such words as "Philadelphia" (brotherly love), "philosophy" (love of wisdom), "philanthropy" (love of humanity). The *philos* word family stresses emotions. Related words may be translated "friends" or "kiss".

Emotional love should not be regarded as unholy. The Father loves the Son with deep emotions (John 5:20). God the Son loved Lazarus evidenced by His crying at his friend's death (John 11:3, 36). The Lord asked if Peter loved Him with this kind of love (John 21:17).<sup>10</sup> Paul expects Christians to love the Lord Jesus with emotional love (1 Corinthians 16:22).<sup>11</sup> Marriages should have the *philos* type of love.

---

<sup>10</sup> The Lord asked Peter twice if he had a committed sacrificial love (*agape* in John 21:15-16). Then in John 21:17 the Lord asked if Peter even had affection (*philos*) towards Him.

<sup>11</sup> Does God love some people more than others? Does God love everyone equally? I think the answer is "Yes" and "No". In terms of *agape* love (sacrificial love), God loves everyone to the deepest degree. In terms of *philos* love (emotional love), He loves believers more than unbelievers. Furthermore, God has a deeper emotional attraction to certain believers over others because of their response to His love. Daniel was greatly beloved (Daniel 9:23, 10:11). Among the many disciples the Lord was closest to twelve and maybe even three: Peter, James and John. The Lord Jesus loved John with emotional love (John 20:2). God loves every believer with infinite *agape* love. However, even the same individual is closer to God at some times in life than others. We each please God more at some times in life than at other times. God's *agape* love

Couples need to feel good about each other. We should be married to our best friend. However, what holds the relationship at times when feelings either do not exist at all or have even become resentment and hostility? Lyrics to some old love songs speak of "losing that loving feeling" or "trying to get the feeling again." If a marriage possesses only *eros* or *philos*, it will become vulnerable in periods of hard feelings, depressed feelings, or the absence of feelings.

Emotional love (*philos*) is neither unholy nor undesirable, but alone it is an insufficient foundation for a secure relationship. Those who think only in terms of a "50-50" relationship have a deficient concept of love. The deepest kind of love endures even when the feelings are gone, and the other person does not seem to be giving in return.

Sacrificial Love:

Husbands and wives should have good feelings towards each other. However, a lifetime of never ending good feelings is not realistic. Two people with sin natures will disappoint each other, usually sooner rather than later.

The actual Greek word used in the verse commanding husbands to love their wives is *always agape* (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33; Col. 3:19). The New Testament contains approximately 140 uses of the verb, 116 uses of the noun, and 62 uses of the adjective "beloved." 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 gives a classic description of *agape* love, and John 15:13 teaches the Lord Jesus Christ displayed the greatest love. All of the types of love are desirable. *Agape* love is the greatest and most necessary for life and marriage.<sup>12</sup>

---

never ends, but His feelings about us vary. We can grieve God (Ephesians 4:30). We can please or displease Him (John 12:42-43).

<sup>12</sup> In many ways *agape* is superior to *philos*. The greatest virtue is love (1 Corinthians 13). The greatest commands are love (Matthew 22:36-40). Love fulfills the entire Law of Moses (Romans 13:10; Galatians 5:14). Scripture definitely encourages the good feeling type of love (*philos*), but it regards *agape* love as greater. Such sacrificial love is unlike human nature, i.e. supernatural.

Did it feel good for the Lord Jesus Christ to die for our sins? At the time were we returning love or keeping our responsibilities to Him?<sup>13</sup> Christ's example of love is to give oneself to do what is best for another regardless of how it feels or whether they reciprocate anything in return. Christ's love is giving, not taking.

Theologians often describe personhood as consisting of mind, emotions and will. The *philos* type of love stresses emotions. *Agape* type love stresses the will. With our wills we chose, we decide, we act, we commit. The Lord Jesus Christ chose to love us when it definitely did not feel good and when we gave nothing in return.<sup>14</sup>

Ideally, a marriage will often have both *agape* and *philos* love. However, only *agape* is a solid foundation. During periods of no feelings or even bad feelings *agape* love provides the commitment to fulfill one's promises. *Agape* love remains constant even if the cost is high and the feeling of perceived return from the other person is low.

*Agape* love comes from the Holy Spirit, "for the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). "The fruit of the Spirit is love" (Gal. 5:22).<sup>15</sup> An unsaved husband may have better character than to define love as selfish consumption. He may have good feelings towards his wife. However, the expectation that the feeling of wedded bliss can be constant is false. Non-Christian homes do not have the strong foundation of *agape* love because they misdefine love as primarily only a feeling, lacking

---

<sup>13</sup> *Agape* love continues without reciprocity. God loved us at a time that we hated Him. "not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). God loved at a time when we were enemies (Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:1-9).

<sup>14</sup> The pain of the cross obviously did not feel good. Unlike *philos* love, *agape* love is not at all dependent upon feeling good. It rather is a sacrificial gift of oneself to do what is in the benefit of another even when the love is not returned (e.g. John 3:16, 13:1, 15:13; Galatians 2:20; 1 John 3:16; Revelation 1:5).

<sup>15</sup> Other verses stress that *agape* comes from God. It is nothing short of miraculous to love so unselfishly (see 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 John 4:7,9,12,19).

experience with Christ's love through salvation and a motivation to imitate Christ's virtue. Sadly, many believers also lack the spiritual maturity and mindset to make the imitation of Christ's love central to life.

**A husband who loves his wife as Christ loves the church will sacrifice his life** (including one day at a time), **will honor his vows, will choose to do what is best for his wife (and children) even when it hurts and nothing seems to come in return.** That is love. **Christ gave Himself up for the Church.** He wants to sanctify her (i.e. cause holiness and spiritual growth). The Lord nourishes and cherishes the church (Ephesians 5:25-29).

God's plan is the imitation of these traits by a husband towards a wife. Assuming obedience to **love as Christ loves the church,** the Biblical position of male authority in the home takes care of itself.

#### How to Treat a Wife

The Bible teaches male authority in the home, but the specific relationship envisioned hardly parallels an ignorant brute that likes to bark orders. Not only is the imitation of Christ's love commanded of husbands, several specific teachings clarify gender roles in the home. If obeyed, decision-making need not lead to friction but to appreciation for each other.

The Apostle Peter tells husbands to **live with your wives in an understanding way** and to **grant her honor** (1 Peter 3:7).

Numerous Scripture texts teach communication skills. God did not give such wisdom so that we could practice it on strangers and friends, but ignore it within the family. Husbands who obey the command to live with a wife in an understanding way will discuss all important issues. To understand means to take views, goals, interests, and opinions into consideration. Husbands who make decisions without understanding and honoring a wife are not only foolish but also disobedient to Scripture.

Important decisions should always be made together. By understanding and honoring each other, a husband and wife come to agreement on

most issues. Independent decision-making by a husband can result in needless friction whereas talking before the decision would have produced the same result with unity. In the minority of times of disagreement one option is to wait. The Bible refers to the wisdom of waiting on God's timing (Psalm 27:14; 40:1; 130:5). In some cases, deadlines or other circumstances force a decision even when a couple does not fully agree. If a husband has tried to obey 1 Peter 3:7 in understanding and honoring his wife, she should be able to trust him and leave the matter in his hands. God gives him the authority to make the final decision. She should yield without nagging (Proverbs 19:13; 21:9, 19; 27:15) or causing grief (Heb. 13:17 by application).

In any Christian position of leadership, the master is always a servant. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Master who came to serve - not to be served (Matthew 20:28). Husbands have the authority in the home with the understanding they will imitate Christ. Assuming a wife is strong in her relationship with God, she will understand her husband's intent to do what he thinks is in her best interest (and/or the children's best interest) even on those occasions she might not fully agree.<sup>16</sup> It is possible to doubt the wisdom of a course of action but fully trust the motivation. If a husband loves his wife, a spiritual wife will return that love. So says Ephesians 5:28, "He who loves his own wife loves himself." <sup>16</sup>

#### Views and Value

The old saying goes, "You don't know what you have until it's gone." Hopefully, this would not be true of marriage. A husband's relationship toward his wife begins in his relationship to Christ. Of course, his attitude toward her personally also greatly influences the relationship. Solomon told husbands to view a good wife as a great reward from God. She is more valuable than any material possession.

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord [Proverbs 18:22].

---

<sup>16</sup> One can appreciate another's intent without thinking the results will be superior.



House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD [Proverbs 19:14].

An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels [Proverbs 31:10].

Men are supposed to view their wives as a great reward from God. Yet, Paul warns against the opposite attitude of resentment. "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them." (Col. 3:19) Any type of leadership can abuse authority when it is used not to benefit but to harm. How would we evaluate a parent who uses authority to harm children out of a motivation of bitterness and resentment? Likewise, Paul's command in Col. 3:19 assumes it is possible for even a Christian husband to make family decisions with an attitude of bitterness. A man might make decisions that purposely make life hard for the family just because he can do so. Knowing this, Paul absolutely forbids it. The antithesis of Christ's love would be to use authority in grumpy cruelty. Real love by contrast involves giving, nourishing, and cherishing (Ephesians 5:25-33). Love does not keep a list of past wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5) and covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8; Proverbs 19:11).

Christ's example of forgiveness and unconditional love means that husbands will view and treat wives as valuable. The Bible definitely gives husbands primary authority in the home. Biblical teaching also restricts this type of authority to be exercised not in a grudging way but with the attitude that a wife is God's greatest reward.

#### Married Men as Family Leaders

The role of a husband as the provider may not be cast aside as limited to one culture or bygone days. It began in the original home (Genesis 3:17-19). Paul assumes men will want to provide for their wives, children and other extended family in need. If a Christian "does not provide for his own," he "is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). A truly amazing number of Bible references command hard work and prohibit laziness, sometimes with sarcastic humor (e.g. Proverbs 26:13-16).

Leadership for husbands includes but is not limited to material provision. God assumes the head of a household will know Bible doctrine and ethical truths. Most texts giving a husband responsibility to know Scripture occur in contexts of fathers teaching children (e.g. Proverbs 1:8; 3:1-2; Ephesians 6:4). Paul assumed that a husband would have searched the Scripture to the degree that he can answer his wife's questions (1 Corinthians 14:35). Not every family man needs to be a theologian, but all are supposed to be thinking about God's Word continually (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; Acts 17:11). Personal obedience in Bible study and attendance at a church that teaches the Bible gives a man knowledge to become a spiritual leader at home. God's will for every husband is spiritual maturity and spiritual leadership in his household. A wife who obeys God will not just tolerate her husband trying to lead. She will **help** him.

## God's Plan for a Wife

### The Imitation of Christ in His Relationship to His Father

Informed Christians all know the command for husbands to love as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25ff.) **The Lord Jesus Christ is the model for husbands in His relationship to the Church.**

Fewer books and sermons include the truth that Christ is also the role model for wives. 1 Corinthians 11:3 teaches, "the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ." The article "the" in front of man means that the reference is not to men and women in general but to a husband and his own wife in particular. **The comparison of a wife is to God the Son in relationship to God the Father. God the Son is co-equal to His Father in Person and worth. Yet, in the work of the Trinity the Son voluntarily chose to submit Himself to the Father.** He remained equal in Person and worth but chose to submit in the position and work of the Godhead.<sup>17</sup>

**A Christian wife's role is to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ in His relationship to His Father.** Females are equal in person and worth to males. When a woman enters a marriage covenant, she is choosing to submit herself in position and work of a family while remaining completely equal in person and worth to her husband.

Male leadership in the home does not mean tyranny and cruelty. The Bible commands husbands to understand and honor wives (1 Peter 3:7).<sup>18</sup> Numerous texts on the "tongue" must still be obeyed within a family and not just society in general. Also, in the Bible the leader is

---

<sup>17</sup> Would Christ in His relationship to His Father be a more important role than Christ in His relationship to the church? Of course, such matters are not contests. This is a question without an answer. Still, the role of Christ in His relationship to the Godhead would not be any less important than His relationship to the church. If a choice must be made, His example as God's Son would be the higher role. Therefore, a wife's role is not any less important than a husband's role in the process of the admiration and imitation of Christ.

<sup>18</sup> Pages 5-10 argue for the equality of the sexes. Pages 15-16 balance male authority in the home with Bible commands on communication and with commands to understand, honor, and love a wife.

always a servant. Husbands are supposed to love sacrificially and should be trusted in making unselfish decisions in the best interest of wives and children. With communication a couple agrees on most decisions. If a deadline forces a decision before consensus, the Bible gives authority to a husband with the understanding he will imitate Christ in sacrificial love. A wife is supposed to imitate Christ as He carried out the will of His Father (John 6:38; Matthew 26:39).

#### A Husband Needs Help

God's original design for marriage placed a wife as a "helper" for her husband. Genesis 2:18 states, "I will make a *helper suitable* for him." Then God created Eve (the name comes from the Hebrew word for *life*). Adam immediately recognized oneness but difference at the same time. "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:23). The New Testament reinforces the idea of helper. "For indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake" (1 Corinthians 11:9).<sup>19</sup>

#### Define Helper!

The Hebrew word for *help* relates to that great Biblical name "Ezra." In the creation account, none of the animals provided suitable companionship for man. Animals can indeed be very nice, but none of us can imagine a satisfactory world of only animals for intimate friends. They have God's breath of life but are not made in His image. Adam quickly tired of trying to communicate with animals. They don't say much of interest or much of anything new. After repeating that creation has been good, God concluded, "It is **not** good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18).

The first woman would be from the man with all other men in the history of the world coming from woman. She would be part of him but different. The phrase "helper suitable for him" means "helper opposite

---

<sup>19</sup> 1 Timothy 2:13 also supports the idea that the order of creation has a bearing on the wife being under her husband's authority (see 1 Timothy 2:11-15). However, the context here deals with the role of women in the church.

him. The animals are on a much lower plane. The woman would be on the same level. Still, she is opposite to him and fulfills his deficiencies and needs. When the man and woman stood face to face, they were on an equal level but opposite each other.<sup>20</sup> They were both one and different at the same time. Each had traits the other lacked and needed.<sup>21</sup> As a man is often lonely without a wife (Genesis 2:18), Genesis 3:16 seems to teach most women also feel a need for a husband, for your desire will be for your husband.

A wife is on the same level as her husband but different. God wants her to help her husband become a man of God by spiritual growth and to become a servant of God by Christian service. She remains an individual, but a wife with a totally independent spirit that puts one's own thing first in life fails according to God's plan. Wives who are spiritual will want to help their husbands to spiritual achievements.<sup>22</sup> Yes, **God wants husbands to lead.**

---

<sup>20</sup> Must a couple have many identical interests, or do opposites attract? Compatibility on core spiritual values is absolutely essential. However, given that both admire and want to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ and given both feel obligated to the authority of Scripture, other secondary differences should not be major problems. In fact, they may enrich life. If a common and deep commitment to God exists, a couple need not be identical in many other respects. Each may provide something the other lacks and there can be discovery, growth, and new appreciation for secondary matters in life.

<sup>21</sup> If God had meant woman to rule over man, He would have taken her out of Adam's head. Had He designed her to be his slave, He would have taken her out of his feet. But God took woman out of man's side, for He made her to be a helpmeet and an equal to him. Richard Strauss attributed this quote to Saint Augustine in Richard L. Strauss, *Marriage is for Love* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), p.18.

<sup>22</sup> By declaring Himself to be our great helper, God reveals the value of a wife mirroring His own character by helping her husband. Among the numerous references are the following: Genesis 49:25; Exodus 18:4; 1 Samuel 7:12; 2 Chronicles 14:11; Psalm 30:10, 33:20, 54:4, 70:5, 121:1-2; Isaiah 41:10, 13, 44:2, 50:7; Hosea 13:9; Romans 8:26; Hebrews 13:6.

Just as the Bible clearly teaches the equality of men and women, it clearly teaches wives should yield to husbands. The subject must be balanced, and some details may be debated; but a fair reading of Scripture supports the main conclusion:

í he will rule over you [Genesis 3:16].

í the man is the head of a woman í [1 Corinthians 11:3].

The women í are to subject themselves, just as the Law [The Law of Moses] also says [1 Corinthians 14:34].

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord [Ephesians 5:22].

But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything [Ephesians 5:24].

í the wife must see to it that she respects her husband [Ephesians 5:33].

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord [Col. 3:18].

í being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored [Titus 2:5].

í you wives, be submissive to your own husbands í [1 Peter 3:1].

í being submissive to their own husbands í [1 Peter 3:5].<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Many of these verses have the Greek word *idios*. English derives *idiosyncrasy* from this word. A wife is to be in subjection to her own husband, but not to every other male. The relationship is a matter of marriage, not gender relationships as a whole.

Paul qualified his command in Ephesians 5:22 with the phrase "as to the Lord." Submission to a husband is obedience to the Lord. Other phrases include "in everything" and "with reverence" (related to the word for fear).<sup>24</sup> Peter gives the example of Sarah who called Abraham "lord" (1 Peter 3:6).

The Greek word translated "subjection" or "submission" occurs approximately 40 times as a verb and 4 times as a noun. New Testament texts which use this word of other relationships include children submitting to parents (Luke 2:51; 1 Timothy 3:4), slaves submitting to masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18), believers submitting to the government (Romans 13:1,5; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13), angels submitting to Christ (1 Peter 3:22), demons submitting to the apostles

---

<sup>24</sup> These verses assume the husband is not asking a wife to violate a higher command from God. Scriptures contain many examples of civil disobedience (Exodus 1:17; 1 Samuel 14:45, 22:17; Daniel 3:18, 6:10; Matthew 2:8, 12, 16; Acts 4:19, 5:29). A government authority tells a believer to sin. In such cases, Daniel suspended obedience to a human law against praying in order to keep the higher law to God (Daniel 6:10). The apostles suspended obedience to the Jewish government in order to keep God's higher law to proclaim the Gospel (Acts 5:27-29). A magazine article reported a story of an unsaved husband telling his Christian wife to commit adultery in order to secure a business contract. This situation obviously involves a higher law of God. She must refuse. In some situations the command to respect a husband is the higher law. In my judgment, for example, a wife should not give money to the church if her husband forbids it.

Usually a husband's authority will not clash with Biblical commands. On one occasion a Christian wife wanted to divorce her unsaved husband because of "child abuse." On further probing, she defined the abuse as the husband bringing the children candy. In this case the wife had a totally unreasonable attitude and a perfectionist expectation of motherhood. She felt she must be "supermom" and protect her children from sugar whatever the cost. She apparently believed that the children would be better off without candy than without a father. The situation would be different if the husband had asked her to commit actual sin against a moral command in the Bible. Obviously, the Bible does not prohibit a father from bringing home sweets after work. In such matters, a wife should submit.

(Luke 10:17,20). All things, including death, will submit to Christ in the end (1 Corinthians 15:27ff.).

Whether we observe the details of Bible texts that command a wife to submit to her husband, or do a word study of the Greek word in other contexts, the result is a strong assertion of male leadership. When a woman chooses to marry, she becomes a helper to her husband.

Previously we argued for gender equality and for defining a husband's authority as the authority of one who "understands," "honors" and uses authority to serve. A husband should first communicate and then decide matters according to his wife's best interests. When he loves as Christ loved the church, when he uses leadership to serve her, following his lead will not be too burdensome. When both husband and wife obey the Bible and imitate Christ, a wife may find fulfillment in her role of helping him.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Bible-based arguments against a husband's authority in a family are not very convincing. One cannot argue that there was a change from Law to grace (from the Mosaic system to the Church). Almost all the commands to a wife to submit to her husband occur in New Testament Scriptures.

Some try to argue that the curse in Genesis Chapter 3 caused a wife's subordinate role and that the curse has been lifted in Christ. The curse indeed made gender roles in marriage far more difficult as both Adam and Eve became selfish with sin natures. Therefore, God had to command male leadership in Genesis 3:16, "he will rule over you." However, the order of creation, not the curse from sin, was the origin of male headship. "For indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake." (1 Corinthians 11:9; see also, Genesis. 2:18 and 1 Timothy 2:12-13 on the order of creation making a wife a helper.)

Gender roles in marriage were made harder by sin but were in place prior to the fall as part of God's design for the home. Still, for the sake of argument assume the entrance of sin is the origin of male headship. This would hardly give grounds to conclude wives no longer need to submit to husbands. The Lord Jesus Christ will remove the curse of sin. However, in the present, thorns still grow, snakes still crawl, childbirth still hurts, men still have to work, and we still have funerals. All the various lines of argument commonly used to overturn traditional marriage fail to overturn the clear and repeated statements that God tells wives to submit to their own husbands.



## Love Your Husbands

Titus 2:4-5 is a key text on Biblical studies about women. Mature Christian women are commanded to encourage the young women to love their husbands *í ö* (Titus 2:4). One interesting distinction is that when the Bible commands a husband to love his wife, it always uses the Greek word *agape* for love. In Titus 2:4 God commands a wife to love her husband with a *philos* type of love. Is there a reason for choosing different words for love?

It may be the case that Paul chooses different words for love purely for stylistic reasons. However, "husbands, love your wives," is *agape* love in Ephesians 5: 25 and Col. 3:19. Wives love your husband is *philos* in Titus 2:4. The husband initiates. The wife responds. If and when a husband loves his wife with sacrificial and unselfish love, she will (assuming her dedication to God) return that love. The sun shines. The moon reflects. The speculative nature of my astronomical illustration is improved by Biblical authority within the statement, "He who loves his own wife loves himself *í ö*" (Ephesians 5:28). If the conditions are true that a man loves his wife as Christ loves the church, she will reflect that love to him in return.<sup>26</sup>

The principle of not making a theological point on a single verse is valid. On the other hand, we only have Titus 2:4. Wives should love their husbands with a tender *philos* type of love. May I suggest that men are generally "rougher" than women. I think it is normal in most marriages for a wife to attempt to sensitize, maybe even civilize her husband. If she loves in a thoughtful, kind and warm sense, over time he may soften up. This process seems to take place in many marriages and may be the basis for the use of the word *philos* in the command for wives to love their husbands.

Perhaps God intends a process of wives tenderizing their husbands over time with constant *philos* type of love. This process may be normal in the course of a relationship. However, the Bible warns against wives

---

<sup>26</sup> Also, the wife will not have a hard time submitting to the leadership of a husband who "honors" her (see 1 Peter 3:7) and makes all his decisions in her best interest.

becoming irritating nags (Proverbs 19:13, 21:9, 27:15). Also, wives must never expect men to stop being men.

There is room for individual variation in different marriages.<sup>27</sup> However, a man need not enjoy poetry, crafts, candles, gardening, or sewing to be a highly successful and faithful husband. Christian husbands should become gentlemen. Christian husbands should not become effeminate. Wives have a ministry from God to tenderize their husbands with a *philos* type of love. However, even a tenderized steak still remains a steak, not a marshmallow.

#### Domestic Duties

The world does not give trophies for homemaking or Nobel prizes for raising the best children. God does. Believers are saved through faith alone by God's grace. However, in the matter of degrees of reward in glory the last shall be first and the first last (Matthew 20:16). Faithful wives, mothers, and grandmothers will be highly blessed by God at the Judgment Seat of Christ. In some cases, Christian leaders with recognized names will obtain less praise and lower positions in the kingdom of God.

Christian homes should not use the phrase "just a housewife." It takes the wisdom of Solomon and the patience of Job to raise a family. Proverbs 31 praises a wife who gives primary attention to domestic pursuits.

She rises also while it is still night and gives food to her household and portions to her maidens. She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and bless her; her husband also, and he praises her. [Proverbs 31:15, 27-28].

---

<sup>27</sup> Gift-giving (flowers, chocolate, jewelry) and card-giving (love notes on Valentine's Day) are a part of showing thoughtfulness to a wife. However, men can give gifts in phony ways and with artificial tenderness just because of societal expectations at certain times. A wise wife should realize that these things are not the essence of love. Also, some men who pay insufficient attention to such things still deeply love their wives.

Every Christian couple must wrestle with Paul's command for mothers to be **workers at home** (Titus 2:5) and also the teaching that widows of child-bearing years should remarry, "bear children," and **keep house** (1 Timothy 5:14).

Relative to careers, the Bible does not restrict single women from high positions in society. If a husband supports his wife's working, and she has no maternal responsibilities, that too is fine. If a woman has children, the children, (not career advancement) become the focus of life's energies.

Some mothers believe they can continue to work and place children as the top priority. Others believe they should work full time at home, especially with their pre-school children.

Life presents a wide spectrum. Some are single mothers. Others find they must work to support senior citizen parents. Others face a husband's disability or business failure. Certainly, if a wife and mother absolutely must work to support a family, Christians should be flexible in attitudes. God wants mercy and not harsh criticism (James 2:13). On the other hand, many parents are rationalizing a two-income family during a child's formative years.

Many families simply live beyond their means, piling up debt. Others refuse a lower but acceptable standard of living that would allow more attention upon children. The Bible commands families with children to give first priority to domestic duties. Couples must take this seriously. For some this may involve a need to work to provide basic essentials to survival. Many other couples could actually manage for a mother to stay at home but fail to see its importance. Mothers who feel they must work should choose to work only for the sake of children's genuine economic needs; not mere career advancement. Far more mothers could get by and not work during a child's formative years. Whatever the exact practice, all families are responsible to place children ahead of careers, and mothers need to take seriously the phrase "workers at home" (Titus 2:4) and "keep house" (1 Timothy 5:14). Mothers of

young children who work must have a conviction it is absolutely necessary for the sake of their children.<sup>28</sup>

### Inner Beauty

1 Peter 3:3-5 does not forbid cosmetics (related to the Greek word for adornment), but Peter does prohibit preoccupation with external beauty over inner beauty. Women who give more attention to the hidden person of the heart to please God with their gentle and quiet spirit (see 1 Peter 3:3-5).

Proverbs speaks of the misery caused by irritable, moody, grumbling, and nagging wives. They are like a constant dripping that annoys (Proverbs 19:13, 27:15). It is better to live in a desert (Proverbs 21:19) or the corner of the roof (Proverbs 21:9, 25:24) than with a contentious woman. One husband told me his wife is a black hole. Whatever time, energy, and money he pours into her does not satisfy her.

Those who work on inner beauty bless their husband in addition to pleasing God. The heart of a husband can trust a virtuous wife (Proverbs 31:11). She does him good and not evil all the days of her life (Proverbs 31:12). While external beauty is nice, it fades over time. Character lasts (Proverbs 31:30). Wives with inner beauty bless their husbands and are blessed in return (Proverbs 31:28).

---

<sup>28</sup> Day-care facilities dare not show favoritism. At home, children can be treated as the most special children in the world. In a day-care setting, a child bonds with a worker who will not be a permanent fixture in life. Fifty-cents per hour someplace else and the child will get another care-giver. It's safe to bond with Mom. She will always be there to meet every need. In a communal setting there are more communicable child sicknesses. Even in the best of facilities, one cannot guarantee the teaching of a Christian worldview, doctrine, and ethics approved by parents. Marilyn and I started married life quite poor; nevertheless, for the above reasons she was a full time mother.

### Conclusion

When correctly understood the Bible gives wise and workable roles for a husband and wife. As genders, men and women are equal before God. A single woman is obviously not under the authority of a husband, and the Bible certainly does not teach all women are subordinate to men.

Within marriage, both husband and wives should imitate Christ as a role model. Husbands should imitate Christ's love and sacrifice for His Bride: the Church. Wives should imitate Christ in His own relationship to the Father. He is equal in person and worth but chooses to submit in position and work.

If a husband lives with his wife in an understanding way (1 Peter 3:7), and communicates, there will be unity on most decisions. When a deadline forces a decision, a godly husband always puts his wife's needs first. Then his authority in the home should not cause conflict. Assuming the godliness of a husband, a godly wife will want to be a helper to him. He gives *agape* love. She reflects back the more tender *phileo* type of love. God's ways are true and practical; and begin with both wanting to imitate Christ in life.

The imitation of Christ is of course, a Christian way of life. We begin by placing our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is God the Son who died for our sins on the cross and rose again. He promises forgiveness and eternal life to all who place faith in Him as Savior. The decision to place faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior can best be expressed in a prayer. "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13).