

# The Christian Husband

A man's relationship with his wife is the closest human relationship he will ever experience. This union is so close that Jesus described it as becoming "one flesh" (Matthew 19:6). This relationship is so close that Paul likened it to that of Christ, the Head, with His spiritual body, the church. The husband and wife are one! Thus my accomplishments are my wife's accomplishments; my money is her money; her needs are my needs; her victories are my victories; her strengths are my strengths. What I do for her, I do for myself. What should I do for her? What is the Christian husband's obligation to his wife?

## LIFELONG COMMITMENT

To begin with, the Christian husband has made a lifelong commitment to his wife. When Jesus was asked about divorce, He said that divorce was permitted for the cause of adultery (Matthew 19:9). However, He emphasized that God intended for one man and one woman to live together for life. He never intended for a married couple to be divorced. His most emphatic statement was "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matthew 19:6).

In spite of God's wishes, divorce is rampant. Men and women get divorced and remarried until their lives are tied up in knots that only a Solomon could untie! In fact, the only happy solution to the problem of divorce and remarriage is simply not to get divorced!

If a husband is to live with his wife for a lifetime without considering divorce as an option, he has to make and keep a lifelong commitment to her. "Till death do us part" cannot be just words in a wedding ceremony—those words must reflect the determination of his heart.

In our world such commitment is often lacking. Thus, when the ardor of love—the romantic love or sexual attraction which drew the husband and wife together—has cooled, any little problem appears to be reason enough to call off the marriage. The husband suddenly realizes that his wife is not as pretty when she is getting out of bed as she was when he went on dates with her before they were married. Maybe she gains a little weight. He may think that she nags him. Soon, he may notice how pretty his secretary is, and then he is likely to start thinking, "Maybe my wife and I shouldn't have married. Maybe it would be better if we broke up this marriage and started over."

What can keep this from happening? Most important, the husband must take his *commitment* seriously! He must determine, "No matter what problems we encounter, I will remain true to my commitment to my wife!" That leads to a second way a husband is obligated to his wife.

## ABSOLUTE FIDELITY

When a couple marries, the husband promises to keep himself for his wife alone. Part of his commitment involves keeping that promise, even though adultery is common. The Christian hus-

band will resist committing adultery because he knows that adultery is a sin which involves more than two people and has widespread consequences. (1) Adultery is a sin against God. (2) Infidelity would be a sin against his wife. (3) It would be a sin against the woman with whom he committed adultery. When a man first commits adultery, he probably does so out of lust, thinking only of his own desires and seeing his partner only as a sex object—but using people as objects is wrong. (4) It would be a sin against the husband of the woman with whom he committed adultery (if she were married). (5) Infidelity would break a solemn vow he made. (6) It would likely have a devastating effect upon his entire family—not only his wife, but also his children, his parents, and other relatives. (7) Infidelity contributes to the disintegration of society. (8) Adultery is a terrible blow to the church, shaming the bride of Christ before the pagan world. (9) Committing such an act would bring upon himself disastrous consequences, even if he later obtained forgiveness for the sin. Remember the results of David’s sin with Bathsheba! (10) Sinning always gives a victory to Satan. (11) Adultery would soil his soul, which was once cleansed by the blood of Jesus. (12) Committing adultery would send him to hell, if he did not repent.

## SEXUAL RELATIONS

The husband has made a promise to his wife concerning sexual relations. Paul wrote,

But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 Corinthians 7:2–5).

This passage teaches that sexual relations in marriage are intended to provide satisfaction of the desires which God placed within both man and woman. It also teaches that the Christian man and woman are interested not only in satisfying their own sexual needs, but also in

satisfying the needs of their mates. Thus the man has two responsibilities in connection with the sexual aspect of his marriage: (1) to satisfy his desires with his wife alone, and (2) to make himself available to satisfy her desires. If he does the latter, she is unlikely to be unfaithful to him.

## FAMILY LEADERSHIP

The husband owes it to his wife to act as the head of the family. The Bible places the role of family leadership squarely on the shoulders of the husband and father. The New Testament says,

And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:21–25; see also Colossians 3:18, 19; 1 Peter 3:1–6; 1 Corinthians 11:2–5).

This is not a popular doctrine. Feminists deny that men ought to be the “head of the house” and assert that women are to be equal in every respect. Whether or not the idea is popular, the Bible teaches that the man is to lead the home.

The reason people have trouble accepting this point of view is that they misunderstand what Ephesians 5:21–25 teaches. Many—men and women alike—believe it teaches that a man has absolute power over his wife. Men sometimes act as if this passage gives a husband the right to come in after work, sit down to relax, and say, “Wife, wait on me!” Some think it means that they can and should boss their wives around as an Army sergeant commands a private. Every man should understand three truths about his headship.

First, his headship is found in a context of mutual submission. Ephesians 5:21 says to “be subject to one another.”<sup>1</sup> In one sense the man and the wife are to submit to one another, and in

<sup>1</sup>There is a question as to whether verse 21 (1) goes with, and completes, the sentence found in verse 20 as in NASB and NKJV; (2) is a separate sentence, not directly tied to either verse 20 or verse 22 as in RSV, NRSV, and NIV; or (3) begins the paragraph which includes verses 22–33, as in the NASB and the New Jerusalem Bible. For several reasons, the third option seems preferable.

another sense the wife is to submit to her husband. How can a man be submissive to his wife if he is at the same time to be her “head”? By serving her! The husband leads as a servant; his aim is to serve his wife.

Second, the headship of the man is characterized by love. The Bible teaches the husband to love his wife as he loves himself (Ephesians 5:33), as he loves his own body (Ephesians 5:28), and as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25). How much do you love your wife? Enough to die for her? If a man loves his wife like that, she will have little difficulty submitting herself to him.

Third, the headship of the man is exercised in ways that are culturally and personally acceptable. What are the “signs” of the man’s leadership in the family? They vary from time to time, from place to place, and from one couple to another. For instance, in some cultures today a woman’s submission is evident because she wears a veil; but in most European countries, a veil would mean nothing regarding submission.

Likewise, in families the evidence of “headship” varies. In some families, the “head of the house” sits at the head of the table, while in others, this is not the case. Since the “sign” of headship varies from one family to another, it may not be possible for one outside the family to say with certainty whether the husband or the wife is “in charge.” What is important is not what others think about your family, but what you know to be true—and what ought to be true is that the husband is the leader of the family.

To the Christian man, leadership is not so much a privilege to be enjoyed as a responsibility to be borne. Upon him falls the task of guiding the family toward an enduring marriage and a successful home.

## LOVE

If the wife owes her husband submission, he owes her love—as much love as Christ had for the church (Ephesians 5:21–29). Christ’s love was selfless and sacrificial; He put the good of the church before His own. The Christian husband’s love must be that kind of love—a love that not only considers her, but also puts her welfare before his own. How does he show that love?

Experts on the family frequently point out

that the husband ought to keep romantic love alive in the marriage. Generally, the wife is more likely to be interested in romance than the husband. The wife likes flowers and soft music; the husband usually can do without these as long as he has sexual relations with his wife. What should the Christian husband do? He should take it upon himself to keep the romance alive; he should woo his wife continually with kisses, hugs, gifts, poetry, and frequent affirmations of love. Why? Not because he feels the need for it, but because she does—and since he loves her, he wants to meet her emotional needs.

In addition, and perhaps more important, he will demonstrate his love for her by being the kind of person defined in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. For example, he will be “patient” with her and “kind” to her, “not jealous” of her. He will not be “arrogant”; he will not “act unbecomingly” toward her (he will be courteous); he will not “seek [his] own” (or be selfish) where she is concerned. He will “not [be easily] provoked” by her, and he will not take “into account [wrongs] suffered” at her hands. (He will not hold a grudge for past wrongs.) He will “[bear] all things” (keep on loving in spite of everything), and he will “[believe] all things” (will not be suspicious). Above all, he will go out of his way to serve and help her, as Jesus, the embodiment of love, did for others.

## MEETING THE WIFE’S NEEDS

Paul said, “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” (1 Timothy 5:8). This passage would certainly apply to a man’s providing for his wife and children. It does not teach that it would be wrong for the woman to contribute to meeting the needs of the family by holding a job, but it does teach that a man should work to provide for his family. If he willfully refuses to work to support his own, he is to be disciplined (2 Thessalonians 3:6–15).

While the husband has the responsibility to meet the physical needs of his family—such as shelter, clothes, and food—he also has the responsibility to meet the family’s other needs. The wife, in particular, has psychological, emotional, and social needs which the husband should recognize. She wants to be reassured that

she is somebody—a person who is important in her own right. Women often suffer from low self-esteem. The husband must take seriously his wife's feelings of low self-esteem ("I'm nobody"), inadequacy ("I can't do anything right"), or undesirability ("No one cares")—and try to help her overcome those feelings. Too frequently, a husband makes his wife feel worse about herself by criticizing her.

### HONOR AND RESPECT

Husbands must think carefully about Peter's words to them: "You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). Two requirements are placed upon husbands: to be understanding and to treat their wives with respect.

Husbands are to try to understand or "be considerate of" (NIV) their wives. A husband can try to be understanding toward his wife, and he can certainly make an effort to be considerate of her.

Husbands also should "respect" their wives. Good wives are due great honor (Proverbs 31:10–29). A Christian husband can solve his wife's problem of low self-esteem (and do himself a world of good) if he will respect her as a person of worth, honor her, praise her, and never criticize her!

### SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

Men—even Christian men—sometimes desire to lead the home without any help from their wives in physical, social, and economic matters. They want to be the sole decision-makers in those areas. However, they are willing to allow their wives to lead the home religiously. Thus the mother goes to church and takes the children with her. She reads the Bible, prays with the children, and helps them develop faith in God.

Obviously, this is not what God intended. The most important responsibility God has given to husbands is to be the spiritual leader of the family. Paul told fathers to bring their children up in the "discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). In Old Testament times, fathers were to teach their children

God's law all the time (Deuteronomy 6:4–9). A major concern of New Testament passages which deal with the husband/wife relationship is the spiritual dimension—"the prayers"—of the marriage. (See 1 Corinthians 7:5; 1 Peter 3:7.) Some have spoken of the husband as the "prophet" and "priest" of the home. That probably goes too far, but the Christian husband is undoubtedly to guide the family religiously and spiritually.

The father must see that his children are taught the way of God, that the family studies the Bible and engages in devotionals at home, that they attend worship services together, and that his children have Christian examples to follow. He also has the responsibility to encourage and strengthen his wife so that they can one day be in heaven together.

### CONCLUSION

In short, the Christian husband is to do everything in his power to serve his wife, make her happy, meet her needs, and help her go to heaven. I recently challenged a class of preaching students to consider this hypothesis: *The breakdown of a marriage, regardless of the reason given for its dissolution, is always the husband's fault!* The students immediately objected, and I agreed with them; both they and I could think of good men whose wives had deserted them for no valid reason. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the hypothesis contains an element of truth.

A good wife's worth is "far above jewels" (Proverbs 31:10). Men, let me urge you to love, nurture, cherish, and hold on to the precious jewel who is your wife! ◆

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### *A Husband's Love*

"A worldly husband shows love with things. He gives things to his family or friends when he is pleased with them. A Christian husband gives the most precious thing he has—himself—even when his loved ones are at their worst. This is the highest kind of love, divine love. Anyone can love people when they are lovable. But loving people at their worst is divine."

*What Every Family Needs or Whatever Happened to Mom, Dad, & the Kids?*  
Carl Brecheen & Paul Faulkner