

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

For Husbands Only

Scripture: Song of Solomon 5:16; Ephesians 5:21–25; 1 Peter 3:7

Code: A158

Valentine's Day may be the one time each year that most husbands let down the macho exterior and actually demonstrate their love for their wives in tangible ways. You might shower your wife with flowers or candy, or take her out on a romantic evening. Some of you may even make greater sacrifices, such as cleaning the house, treating her to breakfast in bed, or buying some cherished gift. But once the day ends, so does Prince Charming, and you revert to your normal self and usual role.

Ask many Christian husbands to summarize their biblical duty in one word, and they will answer, "Leadership." Scripture answers the question with a different word: love.

There is no doubt that God's design for you if you're a husband includes the aspect of leadership. But it is a leadership that flows from love and is always tempered by tender, caring affection. The husband's proper role as a loving, nurturing head is best epitomized by Christ, who took the servant's role to wash His disciples' feet (John 13:3-17).

It is significant that before the apostle Paul instructs husbands and wives how to love each other that he calls for mutual submission. The New American Standard Bible renders Ephesians 5:21 this way: "Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." That's a general command to all Christians in all contexts.

Husbands are no exception to this rule. The love you are to show your wife involves submission. It is colored and characterized by meekness, tenderness, and service. It is a humble, servant's love, like that of Christ.

Submission is what sets the stage for Paul's instructions to husbands: "Love your wives" (Ephesians 5:25). The whole idea of the husband's headship is a comparison to Christ. The husband's headship over the wife is likened to Christ's headship over the church. "The husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church" (Ephesians 5:23). Therefore your love for your wife is supposed to be like Christ's love for the church: "Love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

The sacrifice of Christ is the very epitome of what love calls for. First John 3:16 says, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us." Jesus Himself said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Without actually using the word love, the apostle Peter describes your love for your wife: "Husbands, likewise, dwell with [your wives] with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7).

The headship-submission relationship is not about inherent superiority and inferiority. Many wives are frankly wiser, more knowledgeable, more articulate, and more discerning than their husbands. Yet God has ordered the family so that the man is the head. That is not because the wife automatically owes the husband servile deference as his inferior—for she is not to be treated as an inferior, but as a sister and joint heir. The reason for the divine order is that your wife is the weaker vessel—more to come about that in a moment—and you therefore owe her sacrifice and protection.

My challenge to you husbands is to make every day a Valentine's Day for your wives. Make the following three actions a daily priority in your relationship with your wife and you will be fulfilling your Christlike, sacrificial duty toward her.

Consideration

"Live with your wives in an understanding way," Peter says in verse 7 (NASB). He's speaking of being considerate. This is opposite the cave-man mentality some today would advocate. It's incompatible with the kind of independent, proud, self-absorbed machismo many seem to think epitomizes true maleness. It calls for understanding, sensitivity, and meeting your wife's needs. It involves a sincere effort to understand her feelings, fears, anxieties, concerns, goals, dreams, and desires. In short, you must be considerate.

Often it boils down to listening. You must understand your wife's heart. How can you express a sacrificial love that meets her needs when you have no earthly idea what those needs are?

That is frankly a struggle for most men. It is not something that comes naturally to us. Like our children, we wrestle against our own sinful tendencies and selfish desires. But God calls us to be models of sacrificial love in our families, and that begins by being considerate.

Chivalry

The wife is "the weaker vessel," according to Peter. In what sense are women "weaker?" This has reference primarily to the physical realm. Women are, as a class, physically weaker than men. Now, it is undoubtedly true that there are some men whose wives are physically more powerful than them. But that is unusual, and I believe that even in those exceptional cases, the principle still applies. You are to treat your wife with a gentle chivalry. You can do this in a thousand ways, from opening doors for her to moving furniture and doing the heavy work around the house.

A loving husband would not say to his wife, "After you've changed the tire I'll be glad to take you to the store." We serve them with our strength. We treat them as the weaker vessel, showing them a particular deference in matters where their physical weakness places them at a disadvantage. First Peter 3:7 actually suggests that God designed women to be under the protection of a man, benefiting from his strength. And serving our wives by lending them that strength is one of the main ways we show them a Christlike, sacrificial love.

Communion

We're to regard our wives "as being heirs together of the grace of life." Men and women may be unequal physically, but they are equal spiritually. Treat your wife as a spiritual equal. While you're

legitimately concerned with the task of spiritual leadership in your home, don't forget the responsibility of communion before God with your wife as a joint heir of His grace. Your role as her leader does not mean you are her superior. Both of you are utterly dependent on divine grace, and you are heirs together of that grace.

In the Song of Solomon, the wife says of her husband, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend" (Song of Solomon 5:16). I love that expression. She rejoices in her love for him, but it is not just his romantic devotion that thrills her. It is not his machismo or his leadership that causes her heart to sing. What is it? She is glad that he is her friend. That's the kind of relationship husbands should cultivate. It is a deep sense of intimate, equal sharing of spiritual things. It is a communion together like no other relationship on earth.

Here's a simple way of summarizing sacrificial love: The Spirit filled husband loves his wife not for what she can do for him, but because of what he can do for her. That is exactly how Christ's love works. He loves us not because there's something in us that attracts Him, not because He gains any benefit from loving us, but simply because He determined to love us and delights to bestow on us His favor.

Did you realize that love is an act of the will, not a feeling? It is a commitment to the welfare of its object. It is a voluntary devotion. It involves sacrifice, consideration, chivalry, communion, courtesy, and commitment. It is precisely the kind of love you owe your wife. And if you are willing to obey God, by the power of God's Spirit, you can muster that kind of love for your wife.

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