

**WHAT'S A HUSBAND TO DO?**  
**Ephesians 5:23**  
**For Better, For Worse – Week 1**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. On Friday, February 9, 2024, Lydia and I celebrated our 22nd anniversary. For us, marriage has been a wonderful blessing. But for many in our day, marriage is a burden. Many people are miserably married. Many people are divorced. Those who intend to marry are putting it off longer and longer. And more and more singles never want to get married.
2. So, starting today, we are going to spend a few weeks talking about God's wisdom for marriage.
3. Let's begin with this thought: Marriage should be the best thing in your life.
  - i. God created marriage to be a blessing, not a curse. To be a benefit, not a burden. To help you, not hinder you. To make you happy, not to hurt you.
  - ii. When God created the first man, Adam, he was a bachelor, and God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him (**Genesis 2:18**).” God gave Adam a wife to improve his life. That's God's plan for marriage.
  - iii. One of my favorite verses about marriage is **Proverbs 18:22**. "A man who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord." Marriage is a good thing; it is how blesses us. When you reject marriage, you are rejecting one of God's greatest gifts and blessings to mankind.
  - iv. But, there's a catch.
4. For marriage to work, you must follow God's instructions.
  - i. God intended for marriage to be a great gift, but it's only a gift if you follow His instructions. When you reject His instructions, His blueprints, your marriage will break down.
  - ii. What are God's instructions for marriage?

5. Marriage works best when we embrace our God-given roles and responsibilities.<sup>1</sup>

- i. Your role defines your purpose and overall objective. At work it is usually described by your job title. You might be a manager, or operations coordinator, or an administrator, etc.
- ii. Your responsibilities define how you carry out your role. Managers are usually responsible for organizing and leading people to get work done, for example.
- iii. In marriage, God has specific roles and responsibilities for husbands and wives.
- iv. All husbands have the same roles and responsibilities, and all wives have the same roles and responsibilities.
- v. This implies that men and women are different, and that is what it means. Let me be explicit. The bible teaches that men and women are equal, but different. They are equal in spiritual privilege and eternal importance, but different in their roles and responsibilities. The word for this is complementarianism, as opposed to egalitarianism. Feminism teaches egalitarianism, i.e., the only differences between men and women are physiological. The Bible teaches complementarianism. While equal in value, men and women are very different in their makeup. These differences are intentional, as God made men and women to compliment each other.
- vi. One of the problems of feminism is that by demanding that men and women are equal, they have made men and women interchangeable. In other words, if women can do anything men can do, then men can do anything women can do. There is no longer anything special or unique or irreplaceable about women. In trying to elevate women, they have devalued them.
- vii. But the bible teaches something very different. He created men and women very different. While equal in value, they

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the roles and responsibilities in marriage, see Bruce Wilkinson's book, *Experiencing Spiritual Breakthroughs: The Powerful Principle of the Three Chairs*, chapters 7-8.

both bring something different, unique, and irreplaceable to the marriage.

- viii. As husbands and wives embrace their God-given roles and responsibilities, marriage flourishes. But as these roles and responsibilities are rejected, marriage breaks down.
- ix. Today we will look at the husband's role and responsibility, and next week we will look at the wife.

## II. THE HUSBAND'S ROLE

1. **Ephesians 5:23** "because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body."
2. The husband's role in marriage is headship.
3. What is headship?
  - i. Headship means the husband is the leader in the marriage relationship, just as Christ is the leader of His church.
4. Why does the husband get to be in charge?
  - i. First, it has nothing to do with importance or intelligence.
  - ii. The Bible doesn't tell us why. Instead, it says that the creation story simply reveals that God intended for the husband to be the head.
  - iii. For example, Paul pointed to two facts about creation that reveal that the husband is to be the head:
    1. **1 Corinthians 11:8-9** "8 For man did not come from woman, but woman came from man. 9 Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man."
    2. How do we know that the husband is to be the head?
      - a. The woman was created from the man. She was created from the man's rib.
      - b. The woman was created for the man. To be his helper.
  - iv. In her book, *The Mark of a Man*, Elizabeth Elliot expands on Paul's observations and points to two more facts about creation that reveal God created the man to be the head of his wife:
    1. The woman was made for the man; to be his helper.

2. The woman was made from the man; from one of his bones.
  3. The woman was brought to the man. She was a present for Adam.
  4. The woman was named by the man.
- v. In the same book, Elizabeth Elliot looks not only to the story of creation, but at how God created us, to discern God's plan for us.
1. This is not new.
  2. Theologians say that God has two books, and He reveals truth to us through both books: The two books are special revelation and general revelation. Special revelation is the Bible, and general revelation is nature. The idea is that we can learn a lot about God and about truth by studying nature.
  3. So, Elizabeth Elliot looks not only at what happened at creation, but at the ways that men and women have been created physically different. These differences, she says, teach us about the roles that God has for us in marriage.
  4. If you look at a man's body, he is the initiator. And if you look at the woman's body, she is the responder.
  5. Thus, even our physiology and anatomy reveal that God intended the husband to be the head, the leader of the marriage relationship.
5. Before we go on, let me make some clarifications. Headship does NOT mean:
- i. The husband makes all the decisions. The husband doesn't have to be involved in every decision of family life. The wife can make some decisions without the husband.
  - ii. The husband makes all the decisions alone (i.e., the wife must not share her opinion unless the husband requests it).
  - iii. The wife is his slave. **Andreas Kostenberger** "[Headship] is not akin to slavery where one person owns another. It is not

subservience where one person is doing the bidding of another without intelligent input or interaction.”

- iv. The husband always gets his way.
- v. The husband is the smartest.
- vi. The husband is the most important. **Ray Ortlund** “There is no necessary relation between personal role and personal worth.”
- vii. The husband is to force his wife into submission.

6. What is headship all about?

- i. **Bruce Wilkinson** “Head[ship] means to be the one who is delegated the authority, the one who is responsible, the person in charge, the leader, the one who takes care of the needs of those beneath His headship.”
- ii. **Kostenberger** “[The husband has] the primary responsibility for the marriage union and ultimate authority over his family including his wife.” (*God, Marriage, and Family*.)
- iii. In their book, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, **John Piper and Wayne Grudem** write, “[Headship means] Christlike, sacrificial headship that keeps the good of the wife in view and regards her as a joint heir of the grace of life.”
  - 1. They go on to describe what a head does for a body. It provides nourishment (through the mouth). It provides guidance (through the eyes). It provides alertness and protection (through the ears).
  - 2. Therefore, headship implies leadership, provision, and protection.
  - 3. **They write**, “Husbands are called by God to take primary responsibility for Christlike servant-leadership, protection, and provision in the home....”
- iv. Husbands need to remember three things about headship:
  - 1. Husbands must lead in a way that glorifies God.
    - a. God is the one who has put us in charge. Therefore, we must lead in a way that pleases Him, and in the direction that He wants us to go.

- b. We must never lead our wives to do something sinful. Instead, we must lead our wives to glorify God.
  - c. **Ray Ortlund Jr.** “In the partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, man and woman, the man bears the primary responsibility to lead the partnership in a God-glorifying direction.”  
(*Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood.*)
2. Husbands must lead like Jesus.
- a. Jesus taught us how leaders should behave. He taught the concept of servant-leadership.
  - b. **Matthew 20:25-28** 25 Jesus called them over and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. 26 It must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
  - c. Jesus said we must NOT embrace the world’s concept of leadership. He identified two leadership mistakes we must avoid:
    - i. “Lord it over them.” This means using your personal power to force a weaker person to submit (Bruce Wilkinson, *Experiencing Spiritual Breakthroughs*). In other words, using your physical strength, your size, your voice, to force your wife into submission. It is resorting to manipulation, intimidation, and being a bully to force your will upon your wife.
    - ii. “Tyrants.” This means pulling rank. It means reminding your wife that God put you in

charge. It is telling your wife, “I’m the head; I’m the leader; God put me in charge; you have to submit.”

- d. Instead, Jesus said that leadership is about servanthood.
  - i. That doesn’t mean that the leader is not in charge; that he gives up his authority; that he lets the wife make all the decisions.
  - ii. Servant-leadership is about using your authority for the benefit of those you lead. It is common for leaders to use their authority to abuse people, to take advantage of people, and for their own selfish gain. A servant-leader uses his authority to identify and meet the needs of his people so that they can flourish.
- e. To lead like Jesus means to identify and meet your wife’s needs so that she can be who God created her to be, and fulfill God’s plan for her life.

3. Husbands are responsible for the health of the marriage.

- a. Leadership is not just about being in charge. It doesn’t just mean you get to call the shots. It means you are responsible.
- b. The person at the top is always the person who is ultimately responsible. It doesn’t mean that nobody else has any responsibility, but the person at the top has the greatest responsibility. Whether it is a football team, a university, a company, a church, or a marriage, the person at the top is responsible. They are accountable.
- c. Headship in marriage is not just about being in charge. It means that in the end, God will hold you responsible for the health of your marriage.

- d. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, Eve sinned first, but who did God confront first? Adam, because he was the head.
  - e. **John Piper and Wayne Grudem** “For Christians [in leadership], rights and power recede and responsibility predominates... Authority becomes a burden to bear, not a right to assert. It is a sacred duty to discharge for the good of others.”
7. **Elizabeth Elliot** “Leadership means service, sacrifice, help, uplifting, redemption, and a cross. Leadership is not meant to exploit, but to lift; not to exterminate, but to rescue; not to rend, but redeem; not to devour, but to carry; not for primacy, but for priority. It means, in the last analysis, obedience, service, even death, for the sake of others.”

### III. THE HUSBAND’S RESPONSIBILITY

1. **Elizabeth Elliot** “People are looking for sex without love, for love without marriage, for marriage without responsibility.”
2. In marriage, husbands and wives have responsibilities that must be fulfilled. If you neglect them, the marriage will fall apart.
3. What is a responsibility? A **responsibility** begins with an obligation for which you are accountable (Bruce Wilkinson, *Experiencing Spiritual Breakthroughs*).
4. What is the husband’s responsibility in marriage?
5. **Ephesians 5:25** “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her”
6. The husband’s responsibility in marriage is to love his wife.
7. What does it mean to love your wife? Four things:
  - i. Your love should imitate the love of Christ.
    1. **Ephesians 5:25** “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her”
    2. We don’t get to define what love is, or what love looks like, or how love behaves. We must love the way Christ loved.



3. What is the Biblical definition of love? To truly love your wife is to desire her well-being and to promote her true flourishing as much as you can.<sup>2</sup>
4. One way to understand Christ's kind of love is to compare the two Greek words for love in the New Testament: Phileo and Agape.<sup>3</sup>
  - a. Phileo requires that you appreciate and respect the other person. Agape can be completely one-sided; it doesn't have to appreciate or respect the other person.
  - b. Phileo is conditional. If the conditions are not met, the love will stop. Agape is unconditional; no strings attached. It is based on the internal commitment of person doing the loving.
  - c. Phileo may last for a time, but then stop due to changing relationships. Agape never ends.
  - d. Phileo requires emotional attachment and personal affection. If the emotions and the affection go away, it stops. Agape doesn't depend on emotion; it runs on commitment.
  - e. When the Bible says to love your wife as Christ loved the church, it uses the word agape. You are to love your wife even if you don't appreciate or respect her; you are to love your wife unconditionally; you are to love your wife endlessly; you are to love your wife even if you don't feel love for her.
5. Another way to understand Christ's kind of love is to look at the definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13.
  - a. **1 Corinthians 13:4-8a** "4 Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, 5 is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs.

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<sup>2</sup> This definition is adapted from Thomas McCall's article "I Believe in Divine Sovereignty," Trinity Journal.

<sup>3</sup> On the difference between *phileo* and *agape*, see Bruce Wilkinson, *Experiencing Spiritual Breakthroughs*.

6 Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends.”

b. Bruce Wilkinson put together a series of questions for husbands to ask themselves based on this passage:

- i. Do you suffer patiently when your wife is being difficult?
- ii. Are you kind, regardless of how unkind she is?
- iii. Do you refuse to envy her or anything in her life?
- iv. Do you make a point of giving her the credit?
- v. Do you refuse to treat her rudely, in public or in private?
- vi. Do you choose to never demand that you get your own way?
- vii. Do you never express threatening or uncontrolled anger at her?
- viii. Do you never doubt her and wonder if she is really telling you the truth?
- ix. Do you never secretly celebrate when something bad happens to her?
- x. Do you tell her the truth, even when it's difficult?
- xi. Do you bear whatever comes into her life?
- xii. Do you believe in her, especially when she doesn't?
- xiii. Do you hope the best for her?
- xiv. Do you allow your love to never end?

c. Your love should imitate the love of Christ.

ii. Your love should be sacrificial.

1. **Ephesians 5:25** “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her”

2. Christ endured crucifixion for the church. He died for the church.
  3. To love your wife means to live sacrificially for her. Sacrifice your comfort for hers; your safety for hers; your preferences for hers; your desires for hers; your health for hers; your dreams for hers; your happiness for hers; your security for hers.
- iii. Your love should be as you love yourself.
1. **Ephesians 5:28-29** “28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church”
  2. What does it mean to love your wife as you love yourself? Notice the two words “provides” and “cares.”
    - a. Provide for her.
      - i. Meet her needs. Her spiritual, financial, physical, and emotional needs.
      - ii. Elizabeth Elliot looks at general revelation, or creation, to answer, “What is biblical manhood?”
        1. Leadership: The man’s anatomy teaches that he is an initiator.
        2. Protection: The man’s biology teaches that He is a protector.
        3. Provision: The woman’s anatomy teaches that she is to care for the children, which leaves the man to provide for the family.
    - b. Care for her.
      - i. The word “husband” literally means to “to take care of.” Animal husbandry is taking care of animals.

- ii. This is an interesting Greek word (*thalpo*). It literally means “to keep warm.” Figuratively it means “comfort” and “to cherish.”
    - iii. To cherish. That’s a powerful concept. It means “to hold her dear, value her highly, and treat her tenderly.”
  - iv. Your love should not be bitter.
    1. **Colossians 3:19** “Husbands, love your wives and don’t be bitter toward them.”
    2. In place of “bitter,” other translations use the word “harsh” and “abuse.”
    3. What are some “bitter” behaviors?
      - a. Physical abuse.
      - b. Verbal abuse. Criticisms and insults.
      - c. Sexual sin (adultery, pornography, etc.).
      - d. Withholding affection.
      - e. Depriving her of sex.
      - f. Holding on to distasteful and annoying habits.
      - g. Spending too much time away from home.
      - h. Dishonesty.
      - i. Independence, or neglecting her interests and feelings in your actions and decisions.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

1. **Proverbs 18:22** “A man who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.”
2. The more valuable something is, the greater care and protection it deserves.
3. A wife is a good thing. I would say that next to salvation, she is God’s greatest gift to man. And that means she deserves our greatest care, concern, attention, and effort.
4. Marriage can be a wonderful thing. But we have to fulfill our God-given roles and responsibilities. For husbands, your role is headship, and your responsibility is love. If you want a great marriage, start there.

5. When we have marriage problems, we tend to point fingers. We tend to focus on the flaws and faults of our spouse. Resist that temptation. Go back to what God has called you to be and do, and focus all your attention on that.
6. One of my favorite marriage books is *Love and Respect*, by Emerson Eggerichs. It's based on Ephesians 5:33, which says a husband is to love his wife, and a wife is to respect her husband. He points out that as a man, you deeply want your wife to respect you, and your wife deeply wants you to love her. He says that as you love your wife, you make it easier for her to respect you, and as the wife respects her husband, she makes it easier for him to love her. So, how do you get what you want in marriage? Not by focusing on what your spouse is doing wrong; or on what they should be doing, but by giving your spouse what they need. Husbands, the more and the better you get at headship and love, the more your wife will reciprocate by giving you the respect that you desire.