

A Faithful Head within the Marriage

Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:23,25

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The Christian family is under siege by enemies who want to redefine loving, biblical leadership as oppression over women in the home. No doubt, there are always abuses to which one can point in the use of leadership and authority within the home (or anywhere else), but the abuse of something good does not condemn the lawful use of something good.

Godly husbands and fathers who love and serve their families by providing for their bodily needs, by loving and encouraging them, by feeding and nourishing them in their spiritual needs, by protecting them from all enemies (both physical and spiritual), and by going before the family as an example for the family to follow are sadly AWOL (absent without official leave) or are MIA (missing in action) to such a large extent. The world and the worldly church promote egalitarianism as to roles within a family (where the husband and wife have equal authority within the family). However, the Scripture firmly places that role of leadership upon the shoulders of husbands and fathers (“the head of the woman is the man” 1 Corinthians 11:3).

Dear men, if you are not leading your family by Scripture, by love, by service, and by example, the enemy will find your family to be an easy target to ambush by way of each member going its own way and doing its own thing, rather than being bound together in covenantal love and biblical truth.

As we continue our study of the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22, we are presently looking closely at the fruit of faith (or faithfulness). Faithfulness does not originate in in any of us, but rather originates in the nature of God, who is infinitely faithful and always faithful. And it is the Lord that has implanted in the heart of every Christian at regeneration the fruit of faithfulness, and it is the Spirit of God that causes this faithfulness to grow in our life that we might be conformed to Jesus Christ (who is the faithful witness). But as we have seen, we are not only to be faithful to Christ unto death, but we are also to be faithful to one another, and that faithfulness to one another is especially to be manifested to those of our own household (according to 1 Timothy 5:8).

This Lord’s Day we will focus our attention upon two main questions in considering how the fruit of faithfulness relates to the husband within a Christian marriage: (1) What is the Primary Role of a Faithful Husband (Ephesians 5:23)? and (2) What is the Primary Duty of a Faithful Husband (Ephesians 5:25)?

I. What is the Primary Role of a Faithful Husband (Ephesians 5:23)?

A. As the Apostle Paul draws to a close in his inspired letter to the Ephesian Church, he has laid out the doctrine that is to be believed in regard to the redemption of the church, which is likened to a new man, consisting of both Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 1-4). Now in Ephesians 5-6, Paul turns his attention to the application of that doctrine in the life of the church (especially focusing on the faithfulness that members of Christ’s Church ought to be showing to another within the family (beginning with Ephesians 5:22-6:9). I will begin with what Paul writes about the husband and then we will return to consider what Paul writes about the wife.

B. The primary role of a faithful husband within a marriage is that of a leader, or as Paul states in Ephesians 5:23, a HEAD. No doubt, the concept of headship and authority within the home has received a

black eye due to the tyranny of husbands within the home in exercising an authority that primarily benefits themselves, but there is a lawful headship and authority of which Paul here speaks.

1. Just as the Bible reveals that the church has only one head—Jesus Christ (“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church” Ephesians 5:23), so likewise there is only one head within a marriage—the husband. There are not two heads of the church (contrary to the Church of Rome, which teaches that the invisible head of the Church is Christ and that the visible head of the Church is the pope that sits upon his throne in Rome).

2. Listen to the *Baltimore Catechism* (#117) which has the imprimatur (stamp of approval) of the Roman Catholic Church:

Question: Who is the visible Head of the Church?

Answer: Our Holy Father the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, is the Vicar of Christ on earth and the visible Head of the Church.

3. In fact, the title that the pope takes as Vicar of Christ is equivalent in meaning to that of the great enemy of Christ, Antichrist, which means, one who substitutes himself in the place of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:4). The Scripture never states that the Church has two heads, and certainly God did not create man with two heads (a male head and a female head) upon his one body, so likewise a marriage has only one head appointed by God—the husband.

4. Although the head is ultimately responsible for making good and godly decisions within his marriage, it is a foolish head (or husband) who thinks or acts as though his wife has nothing to contribute by way of wisdom and knowledge to important decisions to be made within the home. Therefore, husbands, let us not act in such a defensive, threatened posture in pushing away the wife that God has given to us and who is there to help us in our calling as godly leaders in our home. We will address how wives are to offer their help in a future sermon on the faithfulness of wives.

5. Note that Paul says in Ephesians 5:23 that the headship of a husband in relationship to his wife is patterned after the headship of Christ in relationship to His Church. Husbands, the Lord has not left us to our own ignorance in seeking to be a faithful leader within the home—He has given us an example to follow in Christ. Men, are our wives learning about Christ’s loving leadership as they observe our own leadership? We can either illustrate the loving headship of Christ over His Church by our godly imitation of Christ’s headship, or we can blur the loving headship of Christ over His Church by our ungodly imitation of worldly headship.

B. Having stated the role of the husband, let us proceed to make some necessary qualifications concerning his headship and leadership in the home.

1. A husband’s leadership (authority) does not in any way imply that a wife is inferior to her husband as to her essential nature, for they were both made in the image of God according to Genesis 1:27. Nor does a husband’s leadership imply that a wife is inferior to her husband as to her spiritual relationship to Jesus Christ, for they are equally “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7), and it is for that reason when a husband does not honor and cherish his wife that God says through Peter that the husband’s prayers will not be answered (1 Peter 3:7). Nor does a husband’s leadership imply that he is necessarily wiser, more knowledgeable, or more gifted in all areas (God told Abraham to listen to his wife, Sarah, in casting Hagar and Ishmael out of his family—“in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice” Genesis 21:12).

2. A further qualification of a husband’s authority in the home is that the husband’s authority to lead is not his own, but rather is delegated to him by God. A husband’s authority is not absolute, but is derived from God alone, who alone is “lord of the conscience” (according to Acts 5:29; 2 Corinthians

1:24). Just as the faithful civil magistrate is the “minister of God” or a servant of God to thee for good (Romans 13:4), so is the faithful husband likewise to be a minister of God or a servant of God to his wife for her good and not for her destruction. Thus, since the husband’s authority is not absolute (but is under the supreme authority of God), neither is the wife’s submission to her husband absolute (but is also under the supreme authority of God—it is always a submission “as it is fit in the Lord” Colossians 3:18). In another sermon, there we will address in more detail how a wife faithfully submits to her husband.

3. Thus, since the husband is God’s minister of good to his wife, the husband must always lead his wife in a way that is first and foremost HONORING TO GOD (i.e. agreeable to His revealed will) and secondly in a way that is EDIFYING OR BENEFICIAL TO THE SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING OF HIS WIFE (2 Corinthians 10:8). God’s glory and his wife’s well-being should always be that which motivates the husband in his leadership (not his own selfish, childish way—“I’m going to have my way whether she likes it or not”). The Lord never delegated His authority to the husband so as to satisfy the selfish desire for power on the part of a man.

a. Although I do not condone the scornful attitude many women have toward the biblical concept of male headship within a marriage, I submit to you that very often their resentment toward male leadership is severely aggravated by either the over-bearing attitude, words, and actions of men toward their wives or by the cowardly attitude, words, and actions of men in surrendering all godly leadership in the marriage to their wives. I have witnessed on a number of occasions when a husband has humbly repented of his abuse of authority in the marriage, how his wife has gladly accepted her husband’s loving leadership.

b. I hope it doesn’t come as a surprise, but gentlemen, our wives may not so much resent our leadership as much as they resent our over-bearing or wimpy leadership. A wife will not respect the leadership of either a bully (who abuses her) or a coward (who runs from his responsibilities in the home). Dear ones, SELFISHNESS AND AUTHORITY lead to the abuse of godly headship in the home. However, SELF-SACRIFICE AND AUTHORITY lead to the use of godly headship in the home (just as Jesus, God made flesh, came not to be ministered to but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many, Matthew 20:28). William Gouge (*Domestical Duties*, p.378) has aptly cautioned us men in the use of our authority.

Authority is like a sword, which with over much using will be blunted, and so fail to do that service which otherwise it might when there is most need. A wise, grave, peaceable man may always have his sword in readiness, and that also very bright, keen, and sharp: but he will not be very ready to pluck it out of his scabbard; he rather keepeth it for a time of need, when it should stand him in most stead. Such husbands therefore as are too frequent in their commands, show themselves not grave, nor wise, nor lovers of peace. As the use of an husband’s authority in commanding must be rare, so when there is occasion to use it, it must be with such mildness and moderation tempered....

4. Husbands, as those who have been given authority within our homes, along with that authority to rule on behalf of God to the edification and well-being of our wives comes a time of reckoning in the future at which time we will stand before the Lord God Almighty and will give an account of our faithfulness in the use of God’s delegated authority within our marriages. Always remember with authority comes greater responsibility. Thus, we should not be conceited over the authority given to us by God, but to the contrary, we should be greatly humbled and fear the Lord in our use of His authority.

II. What is the Primary Duty of a Faithful Husband (Ephesians 5:25)?

A. All of the faithful duties that a husband owes to his wife are summarized under the single word “love.” God has commanded husbands to love their wives because as leaders who have been primarily

delegated God’s authority to oversee the marriage, their weakness and sinful tendency is to abuse that authority by either acting like tyrants or like cowards (either ruling with a rod of iron or running away from all responsibility to lead). But Paul in declaring that husbands are to lead their wives by loving them, makes clear that the use of leadership in the marriage is directed away from the self-centeredness of the husband and rather directed to the good, to the benefit, and to the well-being of the one loved. Thus, a faithful leadership in the home is always to be a “loving leadership.”

B. What is the love that is to be exercised toward the wife (*agapao, agape*, which was the first fruit of the Spirit we considered)?

1. This kind of love is not a mere romantic emotion for his wife that comes and goes, depending upon how he feels. Although there ought to be a strong desire for physical affection on the part of a husband toward his wife, this love in Ephesians 5:25 is much more than mere physical intimacy.

2. Nor is this love in Ephesians 5:25 giving his wife whatever she desires (for it may not be good for her or may be contrary to the revealed will of God—for example, a diamond anniversary ring that will put you into significant debt). Giving in to the demands, threats, manipulations, or tears of our wives is not demonstrating love for them (if what they want is contrary to God’s revealed will and is not good for them). In fact, the love that we husbands are to have for our wives is summarized for us in 1 Corinthians 13. As I read this chapter, let each husband ask himself if he loving his wife as described by God here in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a.

3. Nor do we ever love our wives as we are herein commanded when we love them more than we love Christ (who is always to be our first love, Revelation 2:4). We can only love our wives as we ought when Christ is our first love. Christ is the source of love.

4. The love commanded here is a SACRIFICIAL LOVE and is captured in the word “give” (Ephesians 5:25)—it is a giving love not a taking love. It is a love that looks to the spiritual and physical well-being of the one loved, even at the expense of one’s own comfort, health, and life.

a. Jesus Christ did not simply give us blessings, dear ones, He gave Himself for us. And so will we, husbands, do when we love our wives as Christ loved the Church.

b. In so many homes, wives are essentially bribed to keep quiet and to keep some measure of order in the home by giving them spending money to buy whatever they want (money is supposed to replace the time we husbands ought to spend with our wives). My fellow husbands, in reality, what our wives really want from us is simply that we give ourselves to them and for them—to give them time to talk with us, to walk with us, and to enjoy our mutual love and company together.

5. Husbands, we cannot trample upon and dishonor our wives (the mothers of our children) by our harsh words, by our anger, by our selfishness and self-centeredness, by our deception and lying to them, and yet look upon ourselves as the leaders God will use to promote reformation in our families. The Lord did not treat us, His bride, as a doormat, but willingly laid down His life for her in order to save her, protect her, purify her, and sanctify her. Where a man rules his family without giving himself in loving service to his wife and children (but rather only expecting them to give of themselves to serve him as head of the family), that man will not likely lead his family to Christ, but will more likely drive them away from Christ. For those who are led must know their leader loves them and is willing to give his life for them and has their best interests at heart in the decisions that are made.

6. The love commanded here in Ephesians 5:25 is also a RIGHTEOUS LOVE (as we noted from 1 Corinthians 13). It is a love that does not deviate from or ignore the commandments of God. Showing love in confronting sin in one another’s lives also implies things like waiting for the best time to do so, doing so in all humility, doing so by first removing the beam from one’s own eye, doing so with clear and conspicuous violations of God’s Law rather than with every mere irritation, and doing so with a view to helping rather than destroying the one loved.

7. And finally this love in Ephesians 5:25 is a SUPERNATURAL WORK OF GOD'S GRACE and not a natural work of man's mere determination. Certainly there is a common blessing given by God to even unregenerate men that is unrelated to salvation whereby even the unregenerate can demonstrate a certain measure of these qualities, but only those who are filled with the Spirit of God can know and grow in giving of themselves and bearing the fruit of love and faithfulness. And where there is this type of love being faithfully demonstrated, it is far more likely that a wife will take seriously her submission to her husband (and even take joy in her submission to her husband's authority).

C. Finally, husbands, I ask you to consider how you are training your own sons for their marriage? Will you have to tell them, don't follow my example in leading my wife and your mother, but rather follow Mr. so and so's example. Husbands, if we sincerely desire that our wives follow our leadership in the home with joy and delight, if we earnestly pray for a godly peace and order within our homes, God calls us to imitate Christ in laying down our lives for our wives and in putting aside all selfishness so that they know we lead them because we love them not because we are on a power trip. What woman in her right mind won't delight to follow a husband who loves her as Christ loves the Church?

D. Husbands, this is an impossible calling, that is, from a mere human perspective (to love as Christ loved the church). But with God and His grace we can grow in conforming ourselves to Christ in loving our wives as Christ loved the church. There is hope. Even if your wife will not follow your loving leadership, it is yet your duty to exercise that loving leadership. You cannot resign or abdicate that loving leadership in your home any more than Christ can do so in His Church. If you have failed to lead your wife in a loving and godly manner, repent of that sin and seek her forgiveness, endeavoring to do so in the future.

E. Wives, your encouragement to your husbands in this matter is so very important. For a husband who struggles in this area will not become a more effective leader by continually pointing out his weaknesses and faults. Your prayers for him and your loving submission to him will more likely help him in his leadership than railing against him. Our children will call us blessed, if they see that love manifested between a husband and wife in the home.

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