

. . . As to the Lord

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Introduction.

- A. We live in a society that is extremely confused about the roles of men and women. Just the other day, as I was flipping through the channels on TV, I ran across a perfect illustration of this. It was one of those religious shows where the preacher is preaching to a huge auditorium filled with people, and on this occasion, the subject was the early part of 1 Corinthians 11, which deals with the husband's headship over the wife. The preacher said from this that women need to let men be the spiritual leaders of their households. Strangely enough, this preacher, who was teaching an audience of hundreds if not thousands of people, was a woman. She denied her own words by her actions. In order to teach on 1 Corinthians 11, she violated 1 Timothy 2.
- B. This kind of schizophrenic thinking about how men and women should behave is common in our society. The Bible's teaching on the subject is quite clear, but it is opposed by a feminist chorus that insists that men and women should be accorded the same roles in every sphere of life, including the domestic sphere. They will tell you that any man who wants to be his family's leader is a male chauvinist pig, and any woman who lets her man lead is letting herself be walked on. Too often, women listen to this teaching to their own harm. A recent study concluded that women who consider themselves feminists and demand an equal role in marriage are significantly unhappier than women who embrace the traditional role of helpmeet to their husbands.
- C. All of these things should call us back to the Bible and its timeless teachings on marriage. Consider Paul's words to wives in Ephesians 5:22-24. Paul urges women not to contend with their husbands for leadership, but to be subject to them just as the church is to Christ. Indeed, by comparing the woman's relationship to the man to the church's relationship to Christ, Paul gives many of the most basic teachings of the New Testament a new application to the lives of women everywhere. Let's consider these teachings so we can learn what it means for women to be subject to their husbands as to the Lord.

I. Respect.

- A. The first thing that women need to take from this comparison is the respect that they ought to show their husbands. We see one side of the respect that the church ought to have for Christ expressed in Hebrews 12:2-3. The respect that the church has for Christ is the respect that the follower has for the leader. Jesus is our example. We look at what He has done, and we conclude that He is worthy of our allegiance. We recognize that if we fix our eyes on Him and follow Him, He will take us to where we need to be.
- B. However, the respect of the church for Jesus is based not just on what He has done, but also on His authority. We see Jesus describing that authority in Matthew 28:18. It is absolute. Because God has decreed that it is so, the church is subject to Christ in everything. Christ deserves the respect of the church because of all that He has done, but even were that not true, the command of God is enough to require the respect of the church.
- C. In the same way, the wife must respect her husband. At least partially, this must be based upon her recognition of him as a man who is worthy of respect. Believe me: more than anything else on earth, men want their wives to look up to them. We're not idiots. We know we're not perfect. We know that our abilities are modest at best, that we very often fail at the things we try. We know that. What we want, though, is for there to be one person in the world—our wife—who genuinely believes in us, who thinks we're amazing, who thinks we can do anything. The funny thing is, if she does, quite a bit of the time, we are and we can.
- D. If you want to capitalize on this, ladies, the best way to do this is with genuine praise. Now, I know all husbands are not created equal, but even the most mediocre slob on the planet has something going for him, even if it's his ability to rattle off baseball statistics. Find that thing. Praise him for it. Tell him how impressed you are with his ability to memorize useless numbers that you don't care about (but don't put it like that), and he'll look for other ways to impress you with his memory too. He might even remember to take out the trash.
- E. Ultimately, though, women must respect their husbands, even if the man does nothing whatsoever to earn it. Just as in the case of Jesus, the authority of the husband comes from what he does and from divine decree. Husbands are in charge because God said so, and wives always need to remember that their husband is the leader. Some of the respect she owes him he can earn, but it is always his due.

II. Trust.

- A. In addition to respecting Christ, the church also puts its trust in Him. We see an expression of the trust of Paul, and indeed of all Christians, in 2 Timothy 1:12. Paul has entrusted his entire spiritual destiny to Christ, but he isn't worried. He knows that Jesus will get him where he wants to go.
- B. Similarly, women need to trust their husbands. They need to show their men that they have confidence in the ability that each man has to lead. This trust manifests itself in both words and actions. It shows

up in a wife's verbal approval of the direction in which her husband is leading, and it also becomes apparent in the way that she lends herself to helping him wholeheartedly in his chosen course. Trust respects the decisions the husband makes and does everything it can to make those decisions right.

- C. Of course, there are a couple of caveats to this. First, if the husband is not a Christian and the wife is, this doesn't mean that she should blindly follow him and be lost herself. Obvious, right? Second, this also doesn't mean that women should never offer advice to their husbands. I rely on the things my wife says to me, and I suspect most wise husbands do too. However, this advice needs to be restrained in nature. The sailor who mentions the rocks ahead to the captain shows trust; the sailor who expresses a desire to jump overboard does not.

III. Obedience.

- A. In addition to respect and trust, the church also shows its subjection to Christ in obedience. Romans 6:17 tells us that this obedience is not reluctant or sullen. Instead, it is obedience from the heart. The church obeys Christ not just because it has to, but because it wants to.
- B. The same ought to be true of Christian women and their husbands. In this day and age, we don't like to talk about people obeying other people. It makes us uncomfortable. However, that is precisely what the Bible tells wives to do. In addition, Romans 6:17 identifies both the action and its quality. Women too must obey from the heart to follow the church. This isn't the kind of obedience that we see out of seven-year-olds who don't want to eat their peas and grudgingly promise to eat three small bites in exchange for a piece of pie. It's the obedience that says, "Even if I don't want to do this, I'll do it for you." It's the obedience that is willingly surrendered rather than forced. It's the obedience that comes from love.

IV. Devotion.

- A. Just as the church is respectful, trusting, and obedient, it is also devoted to Christ. It is His church alone. We see Paul describing his concerns for the devotion of the church in Corinth in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3. Paul is concerned lest the Corinthians be led astray from their single-minded focus only upon Christ.
- B. Women need to have this same sort of devotion to their husbands. First, this involves absolute, uncompromising sexual fidelity. I've known men whose wives cheated on them, and it is a devastating blow. It is an act filled with such betrayal and pain that God used it to illustrate His own grief and rage at the spiritual unfaithfulness of Israel. It is critical that women stay devoted to their husbands.
- C. However, devotion involves more than just physical faithfulness. It also involves making sure that the husband has first place in his wife's heart. There must be no man on earth, whether relative or friend, whom she values more than she values him. Only through this devotion can she be truly subject to him.

V. Gratitude.

- A. When we look at the church's relationship with Christ, this relationship is marked by gratitude. The Hebrews writer discusses this gratitude in Hebrews 12:28. Because Christians have received so much from Christ, no less than the promise of an eternal, indestructible, kingdom, they naturally return thanks to Him. To do any less would be to diminish what Jesus has done for us.
- B. In the same way, women ought to show gratitude to their husbands. Most husbands do a lot for their families. I am blessed in having a job I love, but many men spend decades working at jobs they despise for the sake of their families. Even outside the workplace world, being the leader of the family requires a lot of effort, a lot of tough decisions, and a lot of sacrifices. It's important to remember that. This gratitude can be expressed in a number of different ways, but it does need to be brought up.

VI. Honor.

- A. Finally, we also see that the church honors Christ. In 1 Timothy 6:1, we learn something about what his honor entails. Paul here urges servants to obey their masters, not merely for the righteousness of the act itself, but so that they do not bring shame upon the name of Christ. The true church is always concerned about the esteem in which Jesus is held, and never does anything to dishonor Him.
- B. Similarly, women need to take care for the honor of their husbands. They need to make sure that their actions and speech do not bring discredit on his name, but even more importantly, they need not to speak against him. Few things diminish a man as much socially as a wife who speaks of him with contempt. Gossip is always wrong, but it is especially wrong to gossip about one's husband.

Conclusion. If you need to re-devote yourself to Jesus, now is the time.