What Should Be the Husband's Role in Marriage

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There is a story of a man who died and went to heaven to find two signs above two different lines. One sign said: "ALL THOSE MEN WHO HAVE BEEN DOMINATED BY THEIR WIVES, STAND HERE." That line of men seemed to stretch off through the clouds into infinity.

The second sign read: "ALL THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER BEEN DOMINATED BY THEIR WIVES, STAND HERE." Underneath the sign stood one man.

He went over to the man, grabbed his arm and said, "What's the secret, how did you do it? That other line has millions of men and you are the only one standing in this line."

The man looked around with a puzzled expression and said, "Why, I am not sure I know. My wife just told me to stand here."

We have all heard jokes about "who wears the pants in the family." Yet, leadership in the home is no laughing matter. During the last few decades our culture has redefined the meaning and responsibilities of man and woman in society and in the home. Many men are confused and insecure. Many do not know how to act in the home. Growing up, they lacked a good model for leadership at home and have no mental picture of what it means to lead a family. Consequently, they do not lead effectively, or they do not even try. Increasingly, many men are becoming passive in the home. They've decided that the easiest thing to do is nothing. The simplest thing—with the smallest risk—is to stay on the fence with both feet firmly planted in mid-air and let the wife do it. When a man is married to a strong wife who will take over, he often lets her do just that.

Fortunately, there is an answer. The Scriptures clearly give us the model for being a man, a husband and father. I call that model the "servant/leader."

I hope that the concepts I share will help you understand the biblical role of a husband more clearly than ever before. When correctly interpreted and applied, these concepts not only result in freedom for the husband and wife, but also help you work better as a team to combat isolation and conflict in your marriage.

**BIBLICAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE HUSBAND**

**Responsibility #1: Be a leader**

The Scriptures provide a clear organizational structure for a marriage. Following are a couple of typical Scriptures:

*But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.* [1 Corinthians 11:3]
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, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. Ephesians 5:22-30

In his commentary on Ephesians, William Hendriksen points out that God "...placed ultimate responsibility with respect to the household on the shoulders of the husband . . . The Lord has assigned the wife the duty of obeying her husband yet . . . this obedience must be a voluntary submission on her part, and that only to her own husband, not to every man."

"Head" does not mean male dominance, where a man lords it over a woman and demands her total obedience to his every wish and command. God never viewed women as second-class citizens. His Word clearly states that we are all equally His children and are of equal value and worth before Him. As Galatians 3:28 tells us, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

The teaching of the New Testament clearly shows that women are to be respected, revered, and treated as equals with men. Unfortunately, many husbands have not gotten the message. They degrade their wives by neglect or with insensitive and abusive treatment. One cause of the feminist movement may have been that men abandoned God’s design. When God presented Eve to Adam in the Garden, Adam received her as a gift of great value to God and him. When husbands, particularly Christian husbands, do not treat their wives as a precious gift from God and helpmate, they can cause those wives to search for a way to find significance and value as persons, often outside God’s will.

Are you a leader? Men who are "natural" leaders have no trouble answering the question, yes. They know how to take over, control, guide, and get things done. Some men are not strong or natural leaders. How can they lead in the home?

Paul says the same to everyone. God has placed the husband in the position of responsibility. It does not matter what kind of personality a man may have. Your wife may be resisting you, fighting you, and spurning your attempts to lead, but it makes no difference. I believe our wives want us and need us to lead. You are not demanding this position; on the contrary, God placed you there. You will not lead her perfectly, but you must care for you wife and family by serving them with perseverance.

Scripture does more than assign leadership in a marriage to the husband, however. Those same passages you just read also provide a model for that leadership. The Apostle Paul says that the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church. "This comparison of the husband with Christ reveals the sense in which a man should be his wife’s "head." Hendriksen writes, "He is her head
as being vitally interested in her welfare. He is her protector. His pattern is Christ Who, as head of the Church, is its Savior!"

Let’s look more closely at two responsibilities that flow out of proper leadership.

**Responsibility #2: Love your wife unconditionally.**

*Ephesians 5:25* reads, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." Your unconditional acceptance of your wife is not based upon her performance, but on her worth as God’s gift to you. If you want to love your wife unconditionally, always be sure her emotional tank is full. One of the best ways to do that is to affirm her constantly. Let her know verbally that you value her, respect her, and love her. I have discovered that I simply cannot do that enough.

There is no question that words communicate love, but so do actions. You need to do both. As the Apostle John wrote in one of his letters: "let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth" (*1 John 3:18*). One of the missing ingredients in male leadership in homes is sacrificial action. When was the last time you gave up something for your wife-something you genuinely valued, like your golf game, a fishing trip, or your hobby? Sometimes you need to give up something you enjoy so your wife can have a break and see your love for her.

**Responsibility #3: Serve your wife.**

According to the New Testament, being head of your wife does not mean being her master, but her servant. Again, Christ is our model for this type of leadership. Jesus did not just talk about serving; He demonstrated it when he washed His disciples’ feet (*John 13:1-17*). Christ, the Head of the Church, took on the very nature of a servant when He was made in human likeness (*Philippians 2:7*).

One of the best ways to serve your wife is to understand her needs and try to meet them. Do you know what your wife’s top three needs are right now? If she is a young mother, she has a certain set of basic needs. If your children are grown and gone and you are in the empty nest, your wife has a different set of needs that you should try to meet. What is she worried about? What troubles her? What type of pressure does she feel? Learn the answers to questions like that, and then do what you can to reduce her worries, her troubles, her pressures.

What do you know about your wife’s hopes and dreams? I bet she has plenty-do you know what they are? Are you cultivating her gifts? If she has a knack for decorating, do you help her develop that?

Another way to serve your wife is to provide for her. This provision first involves assuming responsibility for meeting the material needs of the family. *1 Timothy 5:8* tells us, "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."

Providing for your wife also means taking the initiative in helping meet her spiritual needs. You do this by modeling godly character, by praying with her, by spending time together in God’s Word, and by looking for ways to encourage her spiritually.
To be a leader, a lover, and a servant is to accommodate your life to the life of the gift God has given you-your wife. Give up your life for hers and, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, He will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."