

The Christian Home (14): Husbandry Duties (part 4)

At the heart of a husband's responsibility toward his wife is loving leadership. A leader leads by example, manages his authority, instructs, corrects, and assumes responsibility (we will consider the latter three next week).

I. Husbandry Leadership

Husbands, God calls you to be your wife's leader. This means that you must be your wife's servant, that you must spend much time with her, that you must give her useful, scriptural, and practical instruction, that you must be a good example to her, and that you must make decisions and delegate responsibilities in your home.¹

1. *A leader leads by example.* Scripture often ties authority together with example. "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you...not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1Pet.5:2-3). "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mk.10:42-45). "His authority over his wife is God's, who has entrusted him with it: and our Savior illustrates His own authority over the Church, by the authority of a husband over his wife. The right and most effectual way of keeping up this authority, is by prudence and gravity, by soberness and piety, and a serious, exemplary and strict life" (Hopkins).² William Gouge found proof that leaders lead by example, from Paul's exhortation to Timothy: "Let no man despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1Tim.4:12). This implies, "it was in Timothy's power to maintain his honor, and not to allow it to be despised; and so is it in the husband's power" (Gouge).³

Question: How may a husband best maintain his authority? *Answer:* That direction which the apostle gives to Timothy to maintain his authority, may first be applied for this purpose to a husband: 'but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.' It is as if he had said, If you walk before them in a manner worthy of your place and calling, and worthy of that honor and respect which is owed to it, showing forth the fruits of love, faith, and other similar graces, surely they will respect you; but if otherwise you conduct yourself shamefully, and not fitting for a minister, you give them good reason to despise you. Even thus may husbands best maintain their authority by being an example in love, seriousness, piety, honesty, etc. The fruits of these and other similar graces showed forth by husbands before their wives and family must work a reverent and dutiful respect in their wives and whole house towards them, for by this means they shall more clearly discern the image of God shine forth in their faces.⁴

Man is the woman's head, Christ is man's head, God is Christ's head. For procuring and preserving which, let the husband be manly, grave, worthy, not light, vain, contemptible. Let him not be bitter, wayward, passionate; let him not be base-minded, vicious, vain-glorious. Dissoluteness and a disordered life in the man do much abate and diminish the

¹ Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 38

² Ezekiel Hopkins, *Works*, 1:418-419

³ William Gouge, *Building A Godly Home*, 2:185

⁴ William Gouge, *Building A Godly Home*, 2:185-186

wife's respectfulness and reverence unto him. Majesty, authority, venerableness in any superior, is not any ways more lessened or sooner lost than by light behavior, personal worthlessness, or unworthy deportment in his place. Whereas true worth, goodness, grace, shining from within, do beget a more loving reverence and reverent love, than all outward forms of pomp and state, than any boisterousness or big looks, can possibly produce.⁵

This practically means, the husband must exemplify a Christ-like love, humility, and piety to his wife (and home). This is how he leads. He says with Paul, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1Cor.11:1). For example, if a husband and wife argue, and sin against each other, the husband must be first to repent and seek forgiveness. Why? Because he is a leader, and he must serve as a leader in every way. The same is true with regards to every area of his life. In the way he speaks about people, attends church meetings, governs his tongue, shows compassion to the needy, and walks close with God. "Where there is an excellent mixture of prudence and piety together, the one to be a guide, and the other to be an example, these will make a man truly awful and reverend; and induce the wife and the whole family to esteem and imitate him" (Hopkins).⁶

If the husband fails to carry himself as he should, he may lose his wife's respect, esteem, and willingness to submit herself to his headship. If he behaves as a fool she will despise him and hold herself to be wiser and better than he. If he behaves as a monster she will likewise despise him; and though she may cower in his presence, this slavish fear is not the submission required of her and beneficial to him. It is necessary to understand how a husband is to behave as head to maintain the authority entrusted to him. For only then will he enjoy a clear conscience before God in the exercise of it, and the comfortable and beneficial submission of his wife unto him for the Lord's sake.⁷

Surely biblical leadership involves being an example for those who are being led. Surely the husband's leadership means that he must strive to be an example, a model, a pattern of godliness, holiness, compassion, dedication, and devotion to Christ. Certainly, because of his remaining sinfulness, no earthly husband will ever be a perfect example for his wife, but that is what he should strive for. And when he fails, he should be quick to confess to his God and his wife that he has failed and ask for forgiveness. Even in failure, the husband must be an example to his wife of how the believer should deal with sin. In failure, as well as at all other times, the Christian husband is to lead his wife by the power and authority of a good example.⁸

2. *A leader manages his authority.* Leaders actually lead. They are not passive or inactive. Robert Bolton derived these truths from the relationship the head has to the body. "The head is the seat of understanding, wisdom, discretion, forecast. Out of which consideration, let the husband stir up, quicken, and enlarge his manly spirit to comprehend and rightly conceive all affairs, provisions, occasions, which may any ways procure and promote his wife's true contentment, honor, and happiness" (Bolton).⁹ This means, the head is designed to lead the body, and not the body the head. A hesitant, wavering, and indecisive man is no leader. While he mustn't be hasty, he must be decisive.

⁵ Robert Bolton, *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God*, 270

⁶ Ezekiel Hopkins, *Works*, 1:419

⁷ Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 192-193

⁸ Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 36

⁹ Robert Bolton, *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God*, 270-271

Husbands manage their authority by directing, commanding, and praising. (1) Directing. Husband's must oversee their home and give wise counsel and direction to each member (but esp. their wife). To lead by oversight, does not mean he must do everything himself or make every decision. "The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain" (Prov.31:11). Husbands trust their wives, to complete those responsibilities entrusted to her. He doesn't do them for her. He gives her encouragement, counsel, and direction. "He must not micromanage trivial and inconsequential things as if his own hand needs to be at the helm in every little matter in the home. Many matters should be and are best committed to the wife's care and charge" (Beeke).¹⁰ "Husbands are called upon to lead their wives by making decisions and by delegating responsibility. To be the leader does not mean that he must bear all the responsibility and do all the work while his wife bears nothing and does nothing. It does mean that he will see to it that the work gets done and that every one knows who does what" (Mack).¹¹

Husbands are supposed to lead, and leading involves making decisions and delegating responsibility. Any organization where only two people are involved needs someone who is final authority, or chaos and confusion will result. Fifty-fifty marriages are an impossibility. They do not work. They cannot work. *In marriage someone has to be the final decision maker.* Someone has to delegate responsibility, and *God has ordained that this should be the husband.* Indeed, the husband must make decisions and delegate responsibility as a servant of his wife. Her opinions, advice, desires, suggestions, requests, fears, and questions should be given serious consideration. The wife is to be the husband's helper. She is to be his chief adviser, resource person, and consultant.¹²

If he will be both husband and housewife, and be dealing with brewing and baking, and washing, and the particularities of these and the like business; it will come to pass that his wife can be helpful in nothing, because he engrosses all things into his own hand. In these things therefore, he should permit his wife to rule under him, and give her leave to know more than himself, who has weightier matters more nearly touching the welfare of his household, to exercise his knowledge in. And if in any of these matters he shall meet with any disorder, it were a part of wisdom in him to advise and counsel rather than to charge and command.¹³

In relation to directing wives, William Gouge warned husbands of being "too strict towards their wives." Such are they: first, "who are never contented or satisfied with any duty the wife performs, but always demand more and more"; second, "who do not care how painful and burdensome they are to their wife. Demanding things with poor timing, as when the wife is weak by sickness, child-bearing, nursing, or other similar means, and so not able to serve as well as otherwise she would"; third, "who hold their wife under as if they were children or servants, restraining them from doing anything without their knowledge and particular, explicit consent"; fourth, "who are too busy in prying into every business of the house, and will have their hand in them all."¹⁴

(2) Commanding. On rare occasions, a husband may have to command his wife. That is, expressly forbid her from an activity or command her to perform an activity. Providing these commands do not violate Scripture, the wife must obey. Three cautions are necessary: (a) the commanding part of a husband's government should be rarely used. "Be very seldom in laying any command upon your wife. An intimation of what you would have done is enough between a husband and a wife; entreaties of a wife

¹⁰ Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 205

¹¹ Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 36-37

¹² Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 37

¹³ William Whately, as quoted by Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 206

¹⁴ William Gouge, *Building A Godly Home*, 2:203-204

do not unbecome a husband and usually they do more prevail than flat commands" (Scudder).¹⁵ (b) The commanding part of a husband's government should be gently used. "If pastors are to correct their opponents with gentleness (2Tim.2:24-25) then surely husbands are to govern their wives, with whom they are one flesh, with gentleness. And if we are commanded to be gentle with all men (Tit.3:2), then how much more ought husbands to be gentle with their wives" (Beeke)?¹⁶

As the use of a husband's authority in commanding must be rare, so when there is occasion to use it, it must be tempered with such gentleness and moderation, as a husband (according to Paul's example) though he has power to command that which is proper, yet for love's sake must rather appeal for it (Philemon 9). Against this is the insolence of many who cannot speak to their wives but by commands. Their authority is like a swaggerer's sword, which cannot long rest in the sheath, but is drawn forth for every little reason. This frequent use of commands makes their commandments regarded as nothing.¹⁷

(c) The commanding part of a husband's government should be used with instruction. Whenever commanding or forbidding a wife, the husband must be cautious not to violate her conscience. "A husband, when he sees her conscience troubled about his command, must relieve her conscience by refraining to press that which seems so burdensome to her" (Gouge). This means two things: first, everything commanded and/or forbidden must be rooted in Biblical precepts and principles. "If you cannot give a biblical reason of your command/prohibition, you would do well to examine your motives and rethink your position"; second, in "doubtful matters (matters not expressly commanded/forbidden in Scripture), he may leave the final choice with the wife. "The conscience is subject to God alone; if it is forced it would be a fearful horror, and a very hell in that party whose conscience is forced" (Gouge).¹⁸

(3) Praising. "The love which a husband owes to his wife further requires that he wisely praise and reward what she has well done. That which the apostle says of the magistrate's authority, may appropriately be applied to a husband's in relation to his wife, 'Do that which is good, and you shall have praise of the same' (Rom.13:3)" (Gouge).¹⁹ Furthermore, Proverbs 31:28, expressly describes husbands praising their faithful wives: "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her." Fewer things "encourage the wife and stir her up to go on and continue in doing well," than evident signs and tokens of gratitude. "Husbands discourage their wife by ingratitude. They pass by many good things ordinarily and usually every day done by their wife without any approval, praise, or reward. They are ready to criticize the least slip or neglect in them, and in such terms as if they never did anything well, so that their wife may well complain as it is in the proverb, *Often did I well, and that hear I never; Once did I ill, and that hear I ever*" (Gouge).²⁰

How else is she to know whether or not she pleases him if he never commends her or shows his appreciation for her? How else is she to know the good he seeks from her if he never marks it by his happy recognition? Therefore the husband must make a point of praising her when she pleases him. Not only will this commendation be a blessing to his wife to see that she brings her husband the good which God intended for him, but it will encourage her all the more to do good to him.²¹

¹⁵ Henry Scudder, as quoted by Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 207

¹⁶ Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 207

¹⁷ William Gouge, *Building A Godly Home*, 2:213-214

¹⁸ William Gouge, *Building A Godly Home*, 2:209

¹⁹ William Gouge, *Building A Godly Home*, 2:204

²⁰ William Gouge, *Building A Godly Home*, 2:204

²¹ Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 210