

719 How Should a Husband Treat His Wife?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

Some people think because the husband is the head of the wife, which means he has a right to be the boss and keep her in line. Well the Scriptures teach that the husband is the head of his wife, but there is more to be said. Stay with us as we explore this important Bible teaching. Today we're asking the question, "How should a husband treat his wife?" Marriage is one of the great gifts God has given to man. I can think of nothing more precious than a husband and wife who have lived their whole lives in a covenant of love and marriage. All marriages have their problems, but I am convinced that when two people love God and love each other they will be able to live together "till death do they part." When people pursue their marriages on God's terms and keep God's laws, they find that their marriages are happy and fulfilling. Today we are focusing on how husbands should treat their wives in the marriage relationship.

The apostle Paul gives us God's description of marriage in Ephesians 5:22-33: Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The Scriptures clearly teach that the husband is the head of his wife, and she is to be subject to him. In our day, when equality seems to be so important, some people think this is unfair, that God gave authority to husbands over their wives. But the idea that this authority somehow gives the man the right to abuse or dominate his wife in an unkind way is not the will of God. Any man who treats the woman he married unkindly is acting very foolishly. He is not only disobeying God, he is deceiving himself. Only a fool could think that abusing his wife will be a benefit to him. Wise husbands know that the better they treat their wives, the more their wives will respond with love and respect. When husbands fail to love their wives, their wives react with behavior that shows a lack of respect. When husbands sense a lack of respect from their wives, they often act in ways that are unloving. So these feelings of being disrespected and unloved tear apart the marriage. But when husbands show love and wives show respect, the marriage prospers and develops. You can make your marriage brighter and better, husbands, if you can learn to demonstrate Christian love to your wife.

If a disrespected husband will love his wife anyway, and if an woman who feels unloved will respect her husband anyway, they can together start putting that marriage back together. A wise husband pays attention to his wife. He is able to see the things that she and every woman need to find happiness in this life. Every woman needs to feel that her husband is close to

her and cares about her. Many husbands keep their distance from their wives, and their wives feel unloved because of it. Wives need husbands who will open up enough to share his thoughts and feelings with her. She feels unwanted or unneeded when he closes up and shuts her out of his life. When he keeps his life secret from her, she feels he doesn't love her enough to trust her. Wives need to know their husbands are loyal to the marriage, that he is not looking elsewhere. She also needs to know he sees her as the most important person in his life (except for God). She needs to know that he cherishes and honors her.

The most important thing a husband can do is love his wife. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 says, "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." Love may start with a warm feeling, but we have to learn how to love our wives; and wives have to learn how to love their husbands. Some folks are harder to love than others, and love will require lots of patience and kindness. Love demands that we set "self" aside. I cannot love someone else if selfishness and self-centeredness is my way. Love rules out envy, arrogance and rudeness. It learns to let small things slide and not be irritated all the time. Love puts up with a lot of demands, believes and hopes the best for others, and endures. Love is the determination to put the best interests of another before our own, regardless of the cost. Jesus loved the church like that, and He asks husbands to love their wives that way.

Loving your wife involves taking the time to be close to her and to listen to her. The happiest couples spend time with each other, talking and listening to each other. Husbands and wives should spend a good while each day in meaningful conversation. Turn the television off, get away from the computer, and talk face to face. A wise husband will take the time share his life with the woman he loves. He wants to know about her and is willing to invest his life in her by listening. To fail to pay attention to your wife is to say to her that you do not care what she has to say. Such behavior is abusive not loving. James said in James 1:19-20, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires." Much of the anger in our homes would go away if people would take the time to listen and understand the people they love. Listen to your spouse, let her finish her sentences, don't act rashly or hastily. Try to understand her life from her point of view.

Treat her with kindness 1 Peter 3:7 says: "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." Some husbands have the awful attitude that because they are the head of the wife, that this position of authority gives them the right to dominate or abuse their wives with their power. Any man who treats his wife like a doormat is violating the will of God. Abusive power is a marriage killer. Husbands, treat your wife kindly, tell your wife how important and valuable she is to you. Watch for the loving smile on her face when you do! The Proverbs writer said, "An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain."

(Proverbs 31:10-11). Notice how the wise husband trusts his wife's judgments and realizes how fortunate he is to have her. It is utter foolishness for a man to expect his wife to love him and meet all his needs, while he treats her unkindly. Husbands, love your wives.

Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). I am amazed at times how kind and good people can be to those outside the family but treat their own families with disrespect. Husbands and wives both should obey the golden rule with their spouses. If we could see ourselves as we really are and how we treat our families, we might be quite shocked. If we had a tape recording of our words or a video of our actions, we might see ourselves the way our families see us. Some folks never consider how difficult they make their family's lives. That's why, every now and then, it is good for all of us to step back and take a long look at how we have treated our families. Empathy is the ability to see things through the eyes of another and to feel what she is feeling. Sometimes we look at ourselves through other's eyes. When we do that, what will we see? Will we like what we see?

Jesus also cautions husbands in the Sermon on the Mount to control their eyes and their thoughts about women other than their wives. He said in Matthew 5:27-30: "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell." Looking at other women is for many men a terrible habit. It says to his wife that she is not the focus of his attention, that there is someone better out there. Job knew that a righteous man kept his eyes in control. He said in Job 31:1-4, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? What would be my portion from God above and my heritage from the Almighty on high? Is not calamity for the unrighteous, and disaster for the workers of iniquity? Does not he see my ways and number all my steps?"

Unfortunately, many husbands are caught up in the habit of pornography. Looking at smutty pictures and videos, they commit adultery in their hearts by turning their attention to someone other than their spouse. Husbands are not alone in this sinful behavior; many wives are now habitual viewers of pornography. When pornography fills the heart, it won't be long before adultery of the heart becomes adultery in life. More than a few homes today are being destroyed by pornography in videos, in literature, and on the internet. The word pornography itself arises from the Greek word *porneia*, a reference to fornication and prostitution. Wise husbands who love God and their wives keep their hearts, their eyes, and their lives clean.

A wise husband will also be a spiritual leader in his home. One of the most spiritually important things couples can do is

spend time together singing, praying, and reading the Bible. There is great value in a husband and wife privately praying together every day. Prayer allows husbands and wives to take their burdens together to God the Father. It allows them to express in each other's presence and in the presence of God their concerns and needs. When two people pray with each other, they develop a spiritual intimacy and unity that builds their relationship. Christian marriages, where God is the center of the home, where love is the order of the day, and where patience and forgiveness are present, and where God's laws are obeyed, almost never end in divorce. God's ways are not only right ways; they are the best ways. When people truly live the Christian life, the way God intended, they find their marriages to be the happiest and most loving. Husbands, do your best to make your home what God would have it to be. Have private devotions at home but also go to church and get involved in the work of the Lord. God's way is truly, truly, a way of blessing.

Not every Christian man or woman is happily married. What can you do if your needs are currently not being met? First, identify and acknowledge your hurts to yourself and your spouse. Hurts cannot be healed, and needs cannot be met, if they are ignored. Most men have a hard time reading their wives minds; wives need to spell it out for their husbands. Each one needs to talk openly, honestly, and lovingly to the other about what he or she needs. Now, the emotional baggage caused by unmet needs doesn't just "go away" with time. Husbands and wives both need to acknowledge their feelings of anger, bitterness or resentment to their spouses. But once you have taken the time to reveal a fault, then forgive your spouse. Paul said in Ephesians 4:31-32, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." The most important thing any couple can do is learn how to settle their differences. Everyone needs to learn the fine art of apologizing and forgiving. All couples have disagreements, but the ones who survive and thrive learn how to put problems behind them. They learn how to talk out a problem and solve it rather than let it fester and destroy the marriage. Peter said, "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

God is so wonderful to forgive us; His forgiveness teaches us how to forgive even the deepest of hurts. God loved you and me enough to send Jesus to die for our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. When we place our faith in Christ as Lord and the Son of God, when we turn away from sin in repentance, when we confess the name of Jesus before others, and after we are baptized, the Lord forgives us (Acts 2:38). The goodness of God towards us makes us want to be good too. If the Lord could forgive all our sins, we can forgive others. I hope and pray that you won't let anything come between you and God. Why not today get your life right with God. Some need to obey the gospel, and some need to be restored to a right relationship with the Father. Don't wait another day. Get right with God today.

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