

720 How Should Wives Treat Their Husbands

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

Last week we explored toward God's will for husbands. Today we want to look at God's will for wives. The love of a good woman can make all the difference in the world in any house. Today we're asking the question, "How should wives treat their husbands?" Paul said in Ephesians 5:22-24, "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." Some wives resent being subject to their husbands, but many wives find that God gives us in Scripture an ideal that is worth following. When husbands treat their wives, and wives treat their husbands the way God prescribes, the home becomes a place of love and trust, of joy and fulfillment.

Peter said in 1 Peter 3:1-6: "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives—when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening." Peter gave this example of Sarah as an ideal for Christian wives to follow. As an apostle Peter was inspired of God and as an elder, Peter himself was married. He knew what a great blessing it was for a man to have a good wife.

Solomon had a lot to say about wives in the book of Proverbs. Solomon, of course, had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Well, I don't recommend that; but Solomon also had been given the wisdom of God, and there are valuable insights we can gain from him. A man who has a good wife is blessed indeed! But a man who has a sorry wife becomes sorry he married her! Solomon said in Proverbs 12:4, "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames *him* is as rotteness in his bones." In Proverbs 18:22 Solomon said, "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD"; but in 19:13 he said, "a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping." You've probably heard that drip when it rains or had a faucet that leaked. A quarrelsome wife is a constant irritation. Proverbs 19:14 says, "Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the LORD." God is very much involved in our lives and blesses us in wonderful ways. A man who has a godly and wise wife is doubly blessed for a lifetime. King Lemuel, not Solomon, in Proverbs 31 gave a marvelous insight into a virtuous woman. He said in Proverb 31:10, "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies." He ends the chapter by saying, "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).

First, the one thing that Paul seems to dwell on for wives is that they show respect for their husbands. Many women find it hard to respect men. I fear that our society has typified those characteristics that make men masculine as crude and juvenile, unworthy of respect. Masculinity, as a whole, has

been under attack in our culture. Some folks in our society even seem to think we really don't need men at all. Of course, such thinking is not realistic. This world could not function or reproduce itself without men. Many men work very hard and sacrifice a great deal to provide for their wives and families. Many men spend hours caring for their wives and children every day. Many men are sensitive and understanding when they need to be and firm when they need to be. Men who love their wives and live the Christian life of honesty, integrity and purity will be men worthy of respect. Some men, however, live their lives without integrity or purity in heart, in word, or in life. Some men treat their wives harshly. How sad. Wives, however, should still respect their husbands.

Why do say that? How can a wife respect her husband when he doesn't deserve it? She gives him respect, not because of who he is but because of who she is. She gives her husband respect, because she belongs to God; and that is God's will. You see the ugliness of others is not an excuse for us to be ugly. We should do what is right in order to serve God, even when doing what is right is not easy. That is the way of Jesus. In 1 Peter 2:21-23, Peter said, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." Jesus loved us even when we were unlovely and sinful. He died for us, even when we were helpless and ungodly. Just as I would tell a husband to love a wife that is hard to love, I would tell a wife to respect her husband even when he is hard to respect. Paul said in Ephesians 5:33, "Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and *let the wife see to it* that she respect her husband."

Peter said in 1 Peter 3:1-6, "Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear." Sarah chose to have a submissive attitude toward Abraham and to honor him by calling him lord. God highly prizes a wife who is submissive and respectful—and so will her husband. A good wife will not put her husband down in public or degrade him in private. I have known some women who seem to take pride in making fun of their husbands to other people. I have known other women who compare their husbands to other men unfavorably. They make sure he knows that he can never measure up in her eyes. Solomon said in Proverbs 21:19, "It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman." I have heard more than a few wives rip a man apart in front of relatives, embarrassing and shaming him. Such behavior is unworthy of a godly woman. She should learn to honor and praise the good. A wise wife knows that if she nurtures and praises him, she will find him a better man. A good wife will not be domineering and dictatorial. A beaten-down man is ashamed of himself and can hardly grow better. He usually will become bitter. A woman who does not respect her husband will usually close his heart against herself. It is foolish to think that she can get him to love her more by treating him disrespectfully.

Second, a wise wife will learn to make herself into a warm and loving companion. Every man wants his wife to be warm and affectionate, to have a cheerful disposition, and to care

about his needs. Paul told the older women to train the younger women to love their husbands (Titus 2:3-4). The things that cause a man to love his wife are the things that keep a man's love. Husbands and wives both tend to take each other for granted as the years pass. Men and women fall out of love with each other, often because they neglect the things that keep the marriage warm and affectionate. Young wives freshly in love want very much to please their husbands. They face life with smiles and love notes and surprises. They do their best to be the apple of his eye in how they look and in what they do. She cares about what he thinks and what he likes.

Husbands and wives must be careful not to neglect their spouses. Many divorces have taken place through the years because of neglect. Sometimes the things that hurt most are not what you do but what you fail to do. The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:2-5, "But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." It is regrettable that many husbands and wives withhold affection and attention from each other for any number of reasons. Paul spoke against that. Husbands and wives should meet the physical needs of their spouses in order to avoid unnecessary temptation.

Third, wives do well to guard their hearts so they can keep their marriages sacred. Someone has said, "Keep your home with all diligence, for out of it will come the joys of your old age." I can think of nothing more beautiful than a husband and wife who have spent a lifetime in love with each other. Solomon said in Proverbs 4:23, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." Wives need to keep their hearts pure just as husbands do. Adultery is not just a man's problem. Potiphar had a wicked wife, who tempted Joseph day after day. How would you like to be Potiphar and have a wife like that? Unfaithfulness starts in the heart. Women who begin thinking "loose" thoughts end up committing loose acts. Paul encouraged the older women to "train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God" (Titus 2:4-5). Young wives need to have pure hearts just like young husbands. Through the years I have listened to several young men who had broken hearts, because their wives had left them for someone else.

Marriages are like a garden. They demand daily attention. Gardens must be watered and fertilized; they also must be weeded. With work, a garden turns out beautiful and fruitful. So it is with marriage. Husbands and wives must learn to feed their relationship and remove the things that tear it apart. 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." What is true for other relationships ought to apply even more to our husbands and wives. We must learn to make marriage a relationship that lasts "until death do us part." Put away the bitterness and anger. Stop the clamor and slander. Be tender and forgiving. Don't let anything come between you and your spouse. Paul again said, "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26-27). This principle of resolving every problem that day will help keep your marriage strong.

In Iowa stands the historic "Little Brown Church." Hundreds of weddings take place there every year. The preacher of that church has adopted a beautiful farewell to the many couples. After the ceremony is over he takes the couple to the entry hall and says, "Before you go, the bride has the honor of ringing the church bell." He places the rope in her hands, and she pulls with all her might. The bell is just too heavy and will not turn. The preacher knows this. So he turns to the groom and asks that he lend a hand and help his bride. Together they pull, and the bell rings, sending out all over the countryside the news of another wedding. Then the preacher says, "As you go out in life, never forget that as long as you pull together, you can ring the bell." Without each other husbands and wives live lonely, empty lives. But together with God, they can make their lives and homes joyful and rich and full. The teaching of God is always what is best for us—but we have to decide that His will must be our will—even when it comes to marriage. I hope you will do just that!

Your marriage is what you make it, husbands and wives. You are choosing each day what you want it to be. You can make it happy and loving or you can kill the joy and make it bitter. You can be a blessing to your spouse or you can be the source of untold misery. You are choosing each day what your life will be. Make it a home that is full of love, full of joy, and full of good things. Your Christian life is that way too. Many people are so unhappy with their faith, because they only play at it. What do I mean? Well they expect much from their Christianity without giving much of themselves to the Lord. There is a law of life that comes into play here and in so many areas of life. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 9:6, "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." You can't sow little in your faith or your marriage and expect to reap much. You cannot expect your faith and home to be full of meaning and joy, when you withhold your heart and life from God. Christianity is not just a feeling in the heart; it is a way of life. This is why from week to week we urge people to come close to God. Many people play at their marriages and play at their Christianity and wonder why it doesn't work for them. Some people arrive late at church and leave early and wonder why they have no friends there. My friend, if you haven't been to church in a while, start building your relationship with him by worshipping Him again with others who love the Lord. Be sure that you are right with God, and it will help you be right with others. Love the Lord, serve Him daily, and trust in Him. If there is sin in your life, get that stumbling block behind you. Turn away from sin. Confess Christ Jesus as your Lord, as Christ the Son of God. And be baptized to wash away your sins. That's a good start in the Christian life, so stay with it all the way.

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