

## **THE LOVING LEADERSHIP OF A CHRIST-HONORING HUSBAND**

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of my favorite Bible verses Bible addressed to men is found in 1 Corinthians 16:13, where Paul writes, “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.” Paul commands men to act like men because they do not! Living in a culture that undermines and devalues everything masculine, many men do not know how to act like men. And we have seen the ramifications of this in the destruction of marriages, the brokenness in families, and the disintegration of our culture. If there was ever a time men need to act like men, it is now. I want to address you men this morning about being a godly husband and how to lovingly relate to your wife. We will see something of the beauty of God’s design that makes for a joyful marriage and that pictures the love of Jesus for his bride. Beneficial all.

When Becky and I first got married, we were a young couple excited to be married, that is until our first disagreement. And then we had several of those disagreements as we adjusted to living together, and one thing God soon showed me was how selfish I was. I still wanted to do what I wanted: my agenda, my kingdom come, my will be done. Well that did not go over too well. The Lord began to break me down and teach me how to be a loving husband, which I am still learning. So what does it mean to be a godly husband? We cannot follow the world because it is so out of step with what God wants for your marriage. So we need to look to God’s word to renew our thinking. This morning we want to look at: The Loving Leadership of a Christ-Honoring Husband (**Eph 5:25-33**). We are going to look at three key truths that are all founded on Christ’s perfect example. Men, you must lead, love, and learn, following Jesus’ example.

When a man gets married, he learns something very quickly: women are different than men. This is why Peter commands husbands, “Live with your wives in an *understanding* way” (1 Pet 3:1). Get to know her. Learn her. She is different from you. So where do I begin? How do I do this? Thankfully,

Paul gives the example of the model husband. Brothers, your loving leadership begins by:

**A. Imitate the perfect husband.** Throughout this passage Paul compares husbands to Jesus. “For the husband is the head of the wife, *as* Christ also is the head of the church.” “Husbands, love your wives, *just as* Christ also loved the church.” “So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies . . . *just as* Christ also does the church” (Eph 5:23,25,28-29). Jesus is presented as the perfect husband and ideal example. By studying Christ and how he loved you, you will learn how to be a godly husband. Loving your wife is a response of your love for Jesus!

When you begin loving your wife as Christ loves the church, this reflects the gospel: Jesus’ unconditional, sacrificial, unending, love for his bride. Our marriages are meant to be the most faithful reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church. Since this true, the role of a husband takes on great significance. Your role is a portrait of how Jesus loves his people. Husbands, you have an incredible opportunity to show others how Jesus loves the church by how you love your wife. This becomes a testimony to your children, to your spouse, and to those around you.

God wants husbands to be courageous and meek; strong and gentle; tough and tender; aggressive and responsive, because this is how Jesus led. Loving leadership is learned from Christ. So brothers, be men of the word, and look to Christ and learn how he treated his people, for this is how you are to treat your wife. How Jesus treated us is the foundation for how you treat your wife. Follow his example.

**B.** From his example, husbands, you are to: **Lead (Eph 5:23)**. Being the head means the husband is responsible to lead. Men you are to lead! Now we know that leadership can be abused and has been, even by Christians husbands. But just because something has been abused does not mean we should throw it out. Because not having a leader does not work either. Someone must lead and men, God is calling you to do that. You must learn to lead like Christ, who sacrificed and served the church. Loving leadership begins by understanding your position.

**1. The husband is the head.** Paul addresses this verse to the wives. He is telling

them why they are be subject to their husbands. Husbands are the head, as Christ is the head of the church. Being the head is a reference back to God's original intent and design of the man and the woman in the beginning. God created the man first as the head and leader and the woman was created as his suitable helper. These roles were established at creation; this is how God designed male and female. So these roles are not cultural; they were not simply for ancient Rome. These roles also are not the result of the Fall of man into sin. These roles were established before there was sin in the world. They are the way God designed male and female. God created the man as the head and the woman as the suitable helper. So when Paul addresses husbands in verse twenty-five, he never commands you to be the head. Why? Because that is who you are; it is how God created you. Men, you are the head whether you like it or not and whether you are acting like it or not. The question is not: will you be the head, but *how* are you doing at being the head? Brothers, God is concerned with the how: are you loving your wife, sacrificing for her, protecting her, leading her, following Jesus' example? This is what Paul talks about, because this is how God wants you to lead. And this is how you bring Jesus honor. Headship is a weighty responsibility. Because of this, we need to know the meaning of headship.

**2. Headship involves having authority to lead** and this authority is from God. We see this idea of authority in how Paul uses the word. The reason wives are commanded to be *subject* to their own husbands is because their husbands are their head. So the word *subject* helps us understand the word *head*. The two go together. The word *subject* is always used of submission to a rightful authority: children to parents (Luke 2:51), citizens to governing authorities (Rom 13:1), servants to their masters (Titus 2:9), Christians to God (Heb 12:9), and the church to Christ (Eph 5:24). So the word *subject* is always used in contexts of voluntarily submitting to an authority of another. Because wives are commanded to be subject to their husbands, this means husbands have authority: a God-given authority. The word *head* itself also implies authority. We see this in the example of Christ and the church (**Eph 5:23b**). Paul uses the analogy of a physical body to help us understand how Christ is the

head and how the man is to be a head. The head directs and leads your body. Christ as the head of his church, lovingly directs and leads her. The church responds by being subject to him. We follow what Jesus says. In a similar way, husbands as the head of their wives, are to lovingly lead and give them direction, and wives are to submit to them. So headship involves authority. So we need to talk about what that means and what it does not mean. It does not mean having an absolute authority; it is given for the purpose of leading and benefitting your wife. God has entrusted into your care his daughter, created in his image, who is precious to him, so you must be careful how you treat her. Authority.

**3. Headship involves activity: leading.** God does not give men authority to do as they please and lord it over others. Delegated authority from God is always limited and given for the benefit of the ones under that authority. God gives government authority. “It is a minister of God,” Paul says, “an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil” (Rom 13:4). The government’s authority given by God, is to protect those who do good and avenge those who practice evil. Elders in the church are given authority not to lord it over the church but to shepherd the flock, oversee it, and be a godly example (1 Pet 5:2-3). Fathers are given authority over their children not to provoke them to anger but to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). Their authority is not to do what they want with their children, but to point them to Jesus. In all of these cases, the authority that is given is limited and to be used for the benefit of the ones under that authority.

We all could probably think of examples where rulers, elders, husbands, or fathers abused their authority. Husbands do this when they see themselves as superior simply because they have authority. Authority does not make you superior; it makes you accountable. Superiority is manifested when you have a double standard, expecting things of your wife that you do not do yourself. Jesus said of the religious leaders, “Do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them” (Matt 23:3). Other men sinfully lead to be noticed. They give the appearance that their marriage, children, and life are in order, acting one way in public and another in private. They love impressing others, but they

do not love the ones they are leading. Men, repent of any sinful ways of leading and look to Christ.

How did Jesus exercise his headship (**Eph 5:23c, 25b**)? Jesus exercised his headship by becoming our Savior. In love, he gave up his life to protect and save his bride. Jesus' headship was active and it was for your benefit. In giving himself, we see Christ's leadership. He was taking decisive action. He was not responding to the church. The church did not plan its own salvation. God did. Christ took the lead to protect and save his bride.<sup>1</sup> He exercised his headship by being a servant leader. It was for your good. So headship is to be understood as one having authority, but it includes how one practices that authority: for the good of those we lead.

Do you remember when Jesus' disciples were arguing over who was the greatest and then James and John jockeyed for a prominent position in Jesus' kingdom? They even got their mother involved. Jesus will not refuse mom! When they pulled that stunt the other ten became indignant with them. Jesus called them to himself and reminded them how the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over people. Some men abuse their authority. They lord it over their wife and kids. They place heavy burdens on their wives, while not lifting a finger to help them: never serving by doing the dishes, laundry, cooking, cleaning, or ever watching the kids. Others lord it over their wives by always telling them what to do and never letting them think or act for themselves. They never listen to their counsel or opinions; it is their way or no way. How foolish, for God has given you your wife to be your helper.

Jesus said it is not this way among you. In his kingdom, it is not this way. The implication is that he will deal with husbands who treat their wives this way. Men, if you desire to be a great leader (and Jesus is not opposed of you becoming a great leader), you must be a servant and if you want to be first, you must be a slave. Brothers, great leadership begins in your home for that is your training ground of how to become a great servant leader. You can fake your life in the church, but you cannot fake it to the people you are living with. The way you become a servant is by following the example of Jesus. He

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 85.

said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28). Jesus is Lord, yet he served you by giving himself to meet your greatest need. This is the essence of great leadership. You die. You die to self and look out for the interests of others.

In biblical terms, headship means *loving servant leadership*. Brothers, you are to lovingly serve the ones you lead. You lead by example. You take initiative and are not passive. Ladies, wouldn't it be wonderful to have men who lead like this; men who picture Christ? What we see here is that leadership is not seen mainly as a privilege, but as a burden. Being the leader means actively leading!

So headship includes authority to lead; it must be active leadership; and third:

**4. Headship involves accountability.** God is going to hold you accountable to how you exercise your leadership. Ladies, this is why men need your prayers and your help. And thankfully God has suited you to be a help to men who lead. Now, if men misuse their authority, God will hold you accountable. We see this in the beginning. Before Eve was created, God commanded Adam not to eat “from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:17). When Adam and Eve sinned, God went looking for Adam not Eve. “The Lord God called to the *man*, and said to *him*, ‘Where are you?’” (Gen 3:9). The man was the head. He was supposed to lead his wife in a God-glorifying direction, which he failed to do. Instead, he passively let his wife lead him into sin and God held *him* accountable. It was role-reversal that led to the first sin, which is why God's fitting judgment on the man and the woman was to curse their roles. The wife's desire will be to usurp her husband's leadership and his response will be to rule over her (Gen 3:16). Thankfully through Christ, husbands, you have the power you need to overcome your sinful flesh and lead in a Christ-honoring loving way.

Men use your authority in a way that honors God. A godly woman will want to put herself under your leadership. She will desire to submit to you and follow you. Do you feel the weight of that? How are you leading her? Are you leading her in a Christ-exalting way or are you leading her in sin-compromising ways? Are you compromising by what you are asking her to wear or what you are

watching with her? Are you compromising by not leading spiritually or leading the children when you are home? Are you compromising by not leading and forcing her to lead? Are you compromising by not being in tune with her life and helping her see areas where she needs to grow and change?

Sometimes men fall into the trap of thinking they are doing their job when they work all day to provide for their family. Brothers, you are responsible to provide for your family if you are able. But that is not the extent of your leadership. After a long day at work, when you come home you are to lead your family in love. Think about how far Jesus exercised his headship; it went all the way to the cross. Jesus gave himself up for you. When Jesus faced the wrath of God, he strengthened himself in prayer. Men, you may be tired when you come home from work. But your job of leading is not done. It has only begun. You will need to ask God to give you strength when you are weak. His grace is sufficient for you. Remember that the context of the roles of husbands and wives is being filled with the Spirit. As you let the Spirit fill you as you are living in obedience to his word, he will give you the strength you need to lead in love. God has “surpassing greatness of . . . power toward us who believe” (Eph 1:19).

Brothers, God has called you to be a servant leader, which means giving what is best for them. The way Jesus led was always for the good of his people. He had their best interests in mind. Men do not let your evenings be wasted on games, hobbies, the internet, sports, or something else. Die to self and prioritize leading your family. Be a servant leader like Jesus.

On the night of Jesus’ betrayal in the upper room, not one of the apostles was a servant. Jesus is about to die; he is about to hand over the kingdom to these men. But they are not servants. They were reclining at the table and someone was supposed to wash their feet. But no one would humble themselves to do it. You can almost hear them thinking: I was one of Jesus’ first followers, one of you late-comers can do it. Well, I saw Jesus transfigured in glory; one of you other non-transfiguration guys can do it. They were proud not humble arguing over who was the greatest. Jesus knew his hour had come; he knew Judas would betray him; he knew he was going back to God. He then got up girded himself

with a towel and washed their feet. The Lord and Teacher served his disciples, doing the lowest task that none would do. He knew who he was and yet served his people. Men, do you know who you are: a sinner saved by grace who is called to lead in love? Will you get up and serve your wife? Will you relieve her of something? Maybe do the dishes or change the baby's diaper? You may respond by saying, "You do not know my wife, she is mean; she hurt me; I do not even like her." Jesus knowing Judas was about to betray him, washed his feet. Will you be a servant leader like Jesus?

Brothers, leaders lead, which means you have a plan of how you will lead your family. Will you lead spiritually with times of prayer, reading, and discussing God's word? Will you lead by lovingly building relationships, spending time to talk, finding out your wife's interests and what is going on in her life? Will you get to know her by asking questions about her joys, challenges, sorrows, and fears? Will you lead by working with your wife through an area of weakness and help her grow as a woman of God? Your plan should include how *you* grow as a man of God, so you can honor Christ in your home. Leading like this is hard work because it requires humility, self-denial, and putting someone else's interests above your own. In other words, it is leading like Jesus who did this for you. Take courage, by Christ's help you can do what he requires.

Men, to lead in love like this you must have Christ. You have to be a Christian. If you have not humbled yourself and received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you cannot do this. You must come to Jesus first. And when you do, you will find forgiveness, eternal life, and power and joy to carry out your role as a godly husband so you honor Jesus.

Ladies, just a word of caution: you cannot demand your husband to take leadership. If you have to demand it, then he is not leading. If your husband had any impulse to try harder, your demanding will take the heart out of it, because he will see himself as giving into your demand instead of leading. Leading has to come from the heart.<sup>2</sup> So instead of demanding, pray earnestly for your husband that God

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<sup>2</sup> Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 88.



will work on his heart. Encourage him where he is leading. And express to him your heart's desire what you would like to see God doing in your family, without giving demands or ultimatums.

So this is the weightiness of biblical headship. It involves authority to lead, activity that must be carried out, and accountability to how you exercise your leadership. Men, how are you doing at leading? Do you feel weak? Do you think: I cannot do this? This is good because you must get to the point where you know you must look to Jesus for help. Men, to lead well, you must be men of prayer and men of the word. You are also to:

**C. Love.** Lead in love (**Eph 5:25, 28, 33**). Three times God says: love your wife. Love her like Jesus loved the church. Love her as you love your own body because you are one flesh. Love her as you love yourself. When the Bible repeats things it is to get our attention because we are probably not doing it well. Men this is not take it or leave it but a command. You are to love your wife. And the word Paul uses for love is agape. This is love seen in actions; it is doing good for the benefit of others. Agape love is characterized by laying aside your rights and privileges for the good of others expecting nothing in return. So when Paul says you are to love your wife, he is not saying you are to have a feeling for her or have a strong attraction to her, but to actively do good for her. Even if you have no feelings, you are to love her anyway. How do you do that? It is not that hard; it is a choice. We all do things that we do not feel like doing because we know it is good to do. You may wake up tomorrow morning and not feel like going to work or school, but you will probably go to work or school anyway because you do not want to lose your job or flunk your class. You choose to go. You choose to love. Agape love is an action; it is giving to the needs of another. Sometimes you feel like doing that and sometimes you do not, but you do it because you want to please God no matter how you feel.

How do you love your wife? Look to Christ.

**1. You love your wife by protecting her (Eph 5:23).** Jesus protected his bride by becoming her Savior. You needed someone to save you from eternal wrath. Jesus got between you and

danger and protected you by taking the fatal blow. The wrath of God you deserved was poured out on him in your place. The husband's role pictures this. You are to protect your wife from danger. You are to guard her from physical and spiritual harm. You are to defend her from any danger that would hinder her usefulness or mar her beauty. Your example is Jesus and how he did this for you.

Brothers, protect your wife from evil influences like ungodly friends and associates. Her closest friend should be you, not someone else. You are to become one flesh with her. So make time for her. Shield her from bad theology. Know what she is reading and who she is following and see if that person is lined up with Scripture, which means you need to know the truth. I have seen wives be led astray right under the nose of their husband because she was following some ungodly influence who claimed to be a Christian. Protect your wife from having too many responsibilities: driving the kids here and there for sports, school, and other activities, things which hinder her from daily getting in the word of God and from faithfully being a help to you. If your wife is too busy help her reevaluate her schedule. You should guard her from dishonor from what you are asking her to wear that it does not cause others to think wrongly of her. Defend your wife from bad attitudes from your children, not letting them disrespect her. Safeguard her from her own sinful tendencies: she may be a workaholic, never taking time to rest or be in the word; she may be prone to laziness or worldliness, investing her time in hobbies, instead of doing her God-given responsibilities; she may struggle with pride, posting her whole life on social media. If you are to protect your wife from these things, this means you must be attentive to what is going on in her life. You need to live with your wife in an understanding way, which means you need to *learn* your wife. This involves communicating with her, asking her questions, and listening to her.

How you protect her is important. She needs to know you are protecting her because you love her. The more she knows you love her and understand her, the more she will be willing to allow you to protect her. But if you are always selfish and inconsiderate, she will resist your attempts to protect her. She may even interpret your desire to protect her as being domineering. But if you are consistently

demonstrating sacrificial love, she will see your desire to protect her as evidence of your love. Second:

**2. You love by giving yourself.** In the Bible, love is consistently connected to giving. “For God so loved the world that he *gave* his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). “The Son of God . . . loved me and *gave* himself up for me” (Gal 2:20; **Eph 5:25**). Love is giving yourself. Because Jesus owns everything, he could have given anything to his bride to express his love. But to convey his love in fullest measure, he gave himself! There was nothing more valuable for him to give. Oh the amazing love of Jesus that he would suffer and die for you, a wretched sinner, an enemy of God. Aren’t you glad he did this for you? The extent of his love is seen in the price paid for you. He gave himself.

From Jesus’ example, we learn that a husband’s love must be sacrificial. You must die. Die to self. Be willing to sacrifice your preferences, your time, your games and hobbies, to lovingly serve and lead your wife doing what is best for her. Your love is seen when you are concerned for her needs. What are her spiritual needs? Where does she need to grow and change? How can you lovingly serve her this way? What are her desires, opinions, and preferences? Find out! Husbands, you are to die to self and love your wife because this is what Christ’s kind of love demands.<sup>3</sup>

From Jesus’ example, we see that he does not love everyone the same. He gives preferential love for his bride. He gave himself for you. This shows that a husband’s love for his wife is to be distinct and special. You are to love her and treat her different from all other women, only having eyes for her. Ladies, would you like to have a husband like this who listens to you, who makes time in his schedule for you, who willingly sacrifices for you because you are precious to him? Ladies, could you respectfully submit and follow a man like this? Men, you can make it much easier for your wife to submit to you if you loved her liked Christ loved the church.

Another thing we learn from Christ’s love is it is given even if it is undeserved. Love is a choice made in spite of (not because of) your wife’s actions, for there will be times when your wife is not

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<sup>3</sup> *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 298.

lovely. She may be in sin; she may be against you, which may tempt you to be embittered against her. You must follow Christ's example and love her anyway. Jesus loved you at your worst, while you were his enemy. So if your wife is treating you like an enemy, then love and pray for her. You are to overcome her evil with good and return a blessing for her mistreatment. This is impossible to do without Jesus. But through his power he can enable you to love like this.

Christ's love wants what is best for the one loved. His love did not allow him to be content with any sin in you (**Eph 5:26-27**). Jesus' love has a sanctifying effect; it makes you holy, more like him. Jesus does this cleansing through his *word*. The result of Jesus' love is the church becomes glorious, more like Christ. A husband's love will want what is best for his wife so she becomes more beautiful. What mars her beauty is sin. So if you see sin in her life, then lovingly admonish her from the word. Instead of giving in to excuses as to why she does not carry out her role or why she does not manage the home, in love help her learn how to be a worker at home. If she feels overwhelmed, then encourage her to humbly learn that from older godly women in the church! Earlier I said that when you come home you must be ready to serve your wife, and that is true. But God does not want you doing her role. She has to learn to do it; so in love direct her to fulfill it. Love wants what is best for the one loved. In love, you need to be sure she is in the word, so read and discuss it with her, and make sure the family is under the teaching ministry of the church, for Jesus works through the word to sanctify his bride.

Christ's goal in his love for you is that you become conformed to his image. This should be the aim of your loving leadership with your wife. Your objective is not to do everything for her. Your goal is to serve her by leading her to Christ through your example and through your actions. If you are really going to loving lead your wife, then you must know Christ, love Christ, delight in him and obey him. It is what you become in solitude with God that makes you a spiritual loving leader.<sup>4</sup> Lead in love. Last:

**D. Learn.** Learn about her. Peter writes, "You husbands in the same way, live with your

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<sup>4</sup> John Piper, quoted in *Loving Your Wife*, Larry E. McCall, BMH publishers, 2009, 72.

wives in an understanding way” (1 Pet 3:7). Live with her in such a way that you really get to know her. Relate to your wife in such a way that it produces togetherness and harmony. This means taking time to talk and listen. Learn about her needs, interests, goals, dreams, joys, sorrows, fears, and temptations to sin. Be attentive to her. Study the various tones of her voice and other non verbal communication so you know when it is time to ask questions. You must learn to understand your wife. What does she like to do? What are her goals and desires? What are her spiritual gifts? What are some of her fears? What are those areas in her life that she needs to change? Learn to study your wife. Understand what makes her tick. Proverbs says, “A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out” (Pro 20:5). Learn to draw out of your wife the things in her heart. To do this, you need to learn to ask good questions and be attentive to her.

In his book *The Complete Husband*, Lou Priolo gives several questions that you can ask your wife that will help build intimacy and help you to get to know her better.<sup>5</sup> I will read this off and post them on our website so you can review them.

- 1) If you could change three things about me that would make me more Christ-like, what would you change? Start with yourself. And by sharing things you need to change, it will make it easier for her to open up to where she may need to change.
- 2) Do I have any other annoying mannerisms or irritating idiosyncrasies that you would like to see me change?
- 3) What specifically would you like to see me do to change in this area (name an area you know displeases her)? This a scary question to ask because it means you must be willing to change.
- 4) On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate our marriage? Ask her what would it take to make your marriage a ten, and be prepared to implement some of her suggestions. It may also be helpful for her to prioritize her suggestions from most important to least important.
- 5) What is your opinion about \_\_\_? This question is powerful because it brings your wife into your decision making. It shows that you value her opinion, that you care about her, and that you are interested in what she thinks about issues that are important to you. I love to get Becky’s opinion because she often sees things from a different perspective than me.
- 6) What personal goals do you have for your life? How may I help you achieve them? She probably

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<sup>5</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Completed Husband*, 33-43.

has objectives she would like to reach that will make her a more godly and satisfied Christian woman. If her desires are in keeping with Scripture and if she can pursue some of them without violating her biblical priorities, one of the most loving things you can do is to help her reach those goals.

- 7) Do you have any needs or desires that you believe I ought to be meeting or fulfilling better than I do? What are they? Together discuss if you should fulfill those desires or simply learn to be content with what you have.

These are some questions that will help you learn your wife and live with her in an understanding way.

**CONCLUSION:** This is the loving leadership of a Christ-honoring husband. When you lovingly lead your wife by imitating Christ, you bring him honor, which is the goal. This is how you act like men. I must confess that it was humbling studying through this lesson. I realize that I still have a long way to go to be the loving leader God wants me to be. After hearing this lesson, you may have realized that too. Let me encourage you: instead of being overwhelmed, just do something. Leaders lead. You cannot change everything at once, but you can do something. Pick one or two things and start doing it today.