

Session 13

Role of Men in the Church

Man as Husband – Ephesians 5

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.”

Ephesians 5:25

- I. The challenge to men as husbands in our society.
 - A. The role of man as husband through history.
 1. Men, after initiation into a society, fill two primary roles in society, that of husband and worker.
 2. In most societies from the past, the man was required to demonstrate his ability in the role of worker before he could assume the role of husband.
 3. Men have typically married at an older age than women, primarily because men were expected to take on responsibilities as caretaker and provider (as well as protector) of women.
 4. Though these prescriptions of society did encourage responsibility, they have created problems for marriages as well.
 - a. Men, because they marry late, have been less likely to maintain sexual purity than women (this imbalance has changed in modern times).
 - b. Men, because they typically were much older than the women they married, did not form close friendship bonds with their wives.
 - c. Women who were divorced (or abandoned) fared much worse in societies than men for they were rendered quite dependent in the marriage relationship.
 - d. The role of men as the “responsible” partner in marriage has permitted men to behave in such ways that women not uncommonly have been abused, yet the society did not protect them.
 - B. For many reasons, but not the least that men did not historically fill their role of husband as they should, women rebelled against the traditional roles of husband and wife.
 1. Women sought friendship and companionship outside the marriage relationship.
 2. Women sought economic equality.
 3. Women sought employment outside the marriage.
 4. Women became more sexually active outside the marriage relationship.
 5. Women sought greater education (in part because they were not respected for their minds).
 6. Women sought greater political power, specifically in terms of protection of women in marriage.
 7. At least since Victorian times, women have become more assertive in their relations with men.

- C. From these developments, society has provided models of a range of shared responsibilities in marriage (including the “house-husband”).
 - 1. Most women now work outside the home and many provide a larger proportion of the income than men.
 - 2. Housekeeping and child rearing responsibilities are now shared in most marriages.
 - 3. Specific responsibilities in marriage which at one time were distributed according to masculine (e.g. cutting the grass) vs. feminine (cooking) characteristics are generally blurred.
- D. Societal norms and legal responsibilities for the marriage are such that it is much easier for men to abdicate their responsibilities as husbands (this may be true for women as well) than in the past. Men have abandoned their families throughout history, however.
- E. Because the role of the husband in marriage is blurred and the necessity for responsibility appears to be less clear, men today struggle with the role of husband.
- F. We are not a society which values lifelong commitment. We are the mobile society.

II. The role of man as husband in the church.

- A. The church has reinforced the role of man as husband reasonably well in the face of societal challenges.
 - 1. Husbands have been strongly encouraged to attend marriage enrichment seminars along with their wives.
 - 2. We hear frequent sermons regarding men taking their responsibilities as husband seriously.
 - 3. Many good role models for men as husbands can be found in our churches (compared to society as a whole).
 - 4. Parachurch groups, such as Promise Keepers, emphasize the importance of men attending to their role as husband.
- B. Nevertheless, the church at times falls short in supporting the role of men as husbands.
 - 1. At times, we ask much of men in other areas to the distraction of their roles as husbands (we demand too much of our men).
 - 2. We don't always appreciate the challenges men face from society to fulfilling their roles as husbands.
 - 3. Given the changing roles of women, we remain unclear and probably ambiguous regarding the complementary roles of husbands and wives when the wife in the family works full time.
- C. Perhaps the greatest detriment to supporting men in their role as husband is our lack of emphasis upon the ideas of commitment and contract.
 - 1. Given the mobility of our society, we don't commit ourselves to membership in a congregation.
 - a. In many cities, one finds many churches which on the surface are acceptable. We “shop” for a church which fits our needs.

- b. We are hesitant to “place membership” because placing membership means commitment.
 - c. If things don’t go well in the congregation, we feel free to move to another congregation (why submit ourselves to a difficult situation?).
 - d. We bring this same attitude to marriage, for in few areas of our lives do we find ourselves making lifelong commitments. If we don’t make commitments at work nor at church, why in marriage?
2. We don’t have a sense of contract in marriage (perhaps in part because we don’t emphasize the importance of contract in our congregations).
 - a. We shy away from “pledge cards”, promises that we will contribute a certain amount over a period of time.
 - b. Church is “volunteer”, so if we agree to participate in an activity and later find that we encounter a conflict, church often becomes the activity we sacrifice.
 - c. Church leaders fully realize that they have difficulty obtaining commitments from members, so they plan accordingly (if you need three men to set up chairs on Sunday morning, better ask and get promises from six).
 - d. In like manner, some men have no sense of marriage as a contract.
- D. Finally, we have lost to a great extent the concept of sacrifice by members to our churches.
1. Churches in the United States have a remarkably easy time (we are free to do just about whatever we desire and most of what we desire to do is fully accepted by our society).
 2. Many members of our congregations feel the church owes them (the church should make the sacrifice, the effort to keep them as members). It’s a “seller’s market” and churches are selling their products to members.
 3. To paraphrase John Kennedy, “Ask not what your church can do for you. Ask what you can do for your church.” sounds very foreign to us.
 4. In like manner, some men approach marriage with the attitude that the first rule of marriage is that the wife owes the husband something

III. Paul’s admonitions regarding the role of the husband in marriage. (Ephesians 5:21-33)

- A. This passage is primarily a passage to describe the relationship of Christ to the church. Yet we can learn of Paul’s view of the role of husbands (and wives) by careful study of the passage.
- B. Underlying this passage is the idea of the marriage contract, the joint agreement between husband and wife. The thrust of the passage is the “will” of the husband (and the wife) to live out the commands and example of Christ in the most sacred of human relationships, the marriage.
- C. The key concept in the passage is “mutual submission” and sacrifice (5:21). Self-seeking has been replaced. Jesus is our great example of putting our insistence of our own rights beside so that we can consider the rights of others. We will focus upon the submission and sacrifice of the husband.

- D. Submission by the husband takes the form of love, “agape” love or a love of will. (5:25).
- E. The Christian husband begins his love of his wife from the perspective of sacrifice, just as Christ came in love as a sacrifice for the church. (5:25) The husband “gives himself up for his wife.” Self-sacrifice, not self-assertion are called for.
- F. Though Paul’s admonition initially is directed toward the wife, the act of the husband is clearly the first act, just as Christ’s love of the church preceded the love of and submission to Christ by the church.
- G. The husband is to present his wife unblemished. Yet this presentation requires that the husband be pure as well. It was Christ’s perfect sacrifice on the cross which permitted Him to present the church unblemished before the father. Clearly, Paul emphasizes the purity of the marriage relationship, especially the purity of the husband as he purifies the wife.
 - 1. During biblical times, the wife would participate in a bridal bath and then dress in clean clothes in preparation for the wedding.
 - 2. The role of the husband is to insure her continued purity and cleanliness through his own devotion and purity. He “presents her to himself.” (5:27)
- H. Husbands are to “love their wives as their own bodies.” The husband is to love his wife as if she is a part of himself, not external to him. (5:28) Yet Paul goes further. The measure of the husband is not just how well he cares for his own body, but how well Christ cared for the church.
 - 1. The husband may let his own body go (smoke, gain weight, become sexually immoral) if he believes what happens to his own body is his business alone.
 - 2. But this is not the biblical way. Our bodies in marriage are tied to one another. The husband dare not neglect his body, for he, in turn, neglects the body of his wife.
 - 3. Rather, he should strive to care for his body in such a way that he can love his wife as Christ loved the church.
- I. The husband is to be devoted first and foremost to his wife (5:31)
 - 1. This verse obviously refers back to Genesis 2:24.
 - 2. The Christian marriage is one of equality, mutual love and respect “the two will become one flesh.”
 - 3. Once again we see Paul emphasizing the unity of humankind in Christ. That unity must pervade the church and the Christian marriage

IV. The church and the role of husbands in marriage.

- A. The evangelical church has recognized the critical importance of the role of the husband in marriage. It has also recognized that husbands are often the weak link in the marriage. Examples of activities to strengthen men in their role as husbands include:
 - 1. Pre-marital counseling – some of the best premarital counseling available comes from counselors or ministers in evangelical churches.

2. Parachurch organizations, such as Promise Keepers and Focus on the Family have worked very hard to engage men to take their roles as husbands more seriously.
 3. Marriage enrichment seminars and programs such as “His Needs, Her Needs” have emphasized that both husbands and wives must participate if marriages are to improve.
 4. Many church activities are planned such that the man fulfills his role as husband through the activity (accompanying his wife to a special function).
- B. Despite the success of these efforts, marriages continue to face difficulties and many men experience much difficulty in their role as husband. What is lacking?
- C. We may place too much emphasis upon the adornments of a good marriage (good sex life, improving communication) and too little attention upon the foundation of a good marriage.
1. Marriage is desired because of the emotions (love) yet it is instituted by an act of will, namely a voluntary “signing” of the marriage contract.
 - a. When we sign a contract to borrow \$100,000 to buy our dream house, we take this contract seriously (I can’t keep my dream unless I abide by the rules of the contract). The mortgage must be paid every month and I can’t just walk away from paying that mortgage, even if I decide I really don’t want a house.
 - b. Do we take the marriage contract as seriously as a mortgage?
 - c. The church must emphasize the importance of the marriage contract (just as we should emphasize that one must “count the cost” when he or she becomes a Christian).
 2. Love by Christ for the church translates first and foremost into sacrifice, a willingness to die for her so that she might be cleansed and purified.
 - a. This type of sacrificial love is what underlay in theory the love of knights for their maidens during the age of chivalry (of course the knights invented games of danger to dramatize their bravery and sacrifice).
 - b. To what extent do we strive for a sacrificial love in marriage from the outset? Do we marry to give or to take?
 - c. The church can emphasize the sacrificial nature of love in marriage (the training ground for understanding the love of Christ for the church).
- D. The church must help men to recognize that they must take care of their own bodies as a means of fulfilling the vows of the marriage contract. During times of despair, it is easy to “let ourselves go”, not taking into account the effect of such inaction upon our wives.
- E. The church must emphasize that the marriage relationship is foremost among all relationships.

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