

Appreciating the First Lady

One

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Gen.2:18).

The most important relationship married men have, is with their wife. Wives are like their husbands; they are not perfect. But they've had a calling from God since Genesis, to help their husbands. Christian husbands generally believe this. But, how do we define "helper?"

This is where life can get interesting. The point is, it is God who defines the nature and extent of what a wife's help should be, not the husband. But that doesn't stop some husbands from trying!

Every husband has to determine what sort of husband he will be, and how he will discharge his God-given authority. Husbands have to make this decision: will my leadership of the home and family be authoritative, or authoritarian? The difference is of vital importance. It can make or destroy a marriage. Google tells us that

An authoritarian leadership style is being used when a leader dictates policies and procedures, decides what goals are to be achieved, and directs and controls all activities without any meaningful participation by the subordinates.

If God wanted husbands to be authoritarian, we'd see it in how God deals with people. But we don't. In fact, we see just the opposite, in so many examples.

Numbers 11 tells us of one of the tougher times Moses was having leading the children of Israel. Moses wasn't happy, and he complained to the Lord,

Why have You been so hard on Your servant? And why have I not found favour in your sight, that You have laid the burden of all this people on me? Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which you swore to their fathers'? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me, saying, 'Give us meat that we may eat!' I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favour in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness (Nu.11:11-15).

What is God's response? God doesn't rebuke Moses for his complaint. God understands Moses' situation perfectly. He cares for Moses, and His people.

Firstly, He commands Moses to gather seventy men from the elders of Israel, and promises to come down and take of the Spirit that is upon Moses, and put it on these men, so Moses will not have to bear the burden of two to three million people alone. Then, He tells Moses that He will come tomorrow, and send a meat supply that will be more than enough for the people.

Is this a mean authoritarian figure in heaven, angry with a struggling delegate? Hardly.

Secondly, we read in Numbers 27 that the five daughters of Zelophehad came to Moses with a complaint, relating to the law God had given concerning the distribution of inheritances. Their father had died and they had no brothers, and it was sons who normally received the inheritance. So they complained to Moses, “Why should the name of our father be withdrawn because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father’s brothers” (Nu.27:4).

Now it could be argued that these women were finding fault with God’s law. They were certainly drawing attention to an injustice that they would suffer, if the Mosaic law as it stood was followed inflexibly.

But observe God’s response to Moses’ query. God did not say,

Well, that’s the way it is girls. The law’s been decided now, don’t you know? Get with the plan. Life can be tough, and you’ll have to live with this. Don’t bring your legal anomaly problems to me, because I can’t be bothered.

No. He said to Moses:

The daughters of Zelophehad are right in their statements. You shall surely give them a hereditary possession among their father’s brothers, and you shall transfer the inheritance of their father to them (v.7).

God dealt with these women with perfect understanding of their situation, and perfect justice. Their legitimate complaint led to God instructing Moses to change His law (v.8-11).

The Bible says,

Great are the works of the Lord; they are studied by all who delight in them (Ps.111:2).

The notion of authoritarian leadership is alien to God. It should be to all husbands and fathers.

Two

Is God’s leadership authoritarian? No. How do I know that?

Authoritarian leaders like all tyrants, are moral cowards. What matters to them is the maintenance of their authority, not the truth, or what is best for those they are supposed to be serving. This is always a highly destructive attitude for any leader to hold, in a family, a business, a church or a nation.

Nabal (I Sam.25) was an authoritarian leader of his household. The Bible says he was “...harsh and evil in his dealings” (v.3). When his servant observed how rudely he rejected a request from David’s servants for material assistance, the servant pointed out to Abigail, Nabal’s wife, that “...he is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him” (v.17).

In his folly, Nabal destroyed himself (vs.37-38). If it hadn’t been for Abigail’s wise and brave intercession with David, Nabal would have brought destruction upon his whole household.

Authoritarian husbands in the church hide behind Bible verses that suit their argument, like Ephesians 5:24: “But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be subject to their husbands in everything.”

Should wives obey this verse?

Of course, but husbands are foolish if they view this text in a one-dimensional manner. A wife's help towards her husband has many facets to it, that some husbands don't understand. It's taken me a long time to understand all the ways my wife can help me.

On many occasions we've been out somewhere, and when we got home, my wife had some observations to make about what had taken place. Sometimes, it was because she thought my comments to others were excessive, or I had come across as extreme, or arrogant, or I needed to tone down the rhetoric. Sometimes she thought I'd shown too much attention to another female, and she said so.

Those sorts of comments are blunt and confronting. They are not designed to stroke and comfort my ego, and it's only a fool who thinks his wife should be there to comfort his ego, because the Bible says, "...God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). And I've had to think about what I'd said and done, and also consider verses like these:

A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool (Prov.17:10).

Reproofs for discipline are the way of life (Prov.6:23).

He who regards reproof will be honoured (Prov.13:18).

Faithful are the wounds of a friend... (Prov.27:6).

Every husband has to ask himself this question: Which is better: to love, accept and submit to the truth (regardless of who gave it to you, or the consequences), or be an egotistical fool? You don't need a lot of Bible knowledge to answer that question.

Naaman in the Bible shows us what a difference this can make. Twice (see II Kings 5: 2-3, 13) he took advice from people who were under his authority, one of these being a captured little girl from Israel. On both occasions, taking advice from someone under his authority, propelled him towards his healing from leprosy.

It's easy for a husband to say to his wife,

God put me in authority, and I'm not taking no advice from you.

But all he proves in the process, is that he's getting dangerously like Nabal.

There is a lot more on this subject in the Bible, if husbands (who can be proud and arrogant), will care to pay any attention. Like,

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. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life (Prov.31:10-12).

Conclusion:

If husbands understand the Biblical role of their wife, it will lead to them appreciating her. It will lead to them making greater room for her opinions and attitudes, and all the members of

the household will benefit from the greater harmony and richness of relationship this will bring.

Shouldn't every godly husband want this?

The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honour and life (Prov.22:4).

Three

You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honour as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered (1 Pet.3:7).

This passage is clear: when husbands show their wife honour as a “fellow heir,” it leads to improvement in their relationship, and blessing in the home.

What is it that stops husbands honouring their wife? When they neglect to love her, and focus on their own status and power, rather than integrity, responsibility and faithfulness. Status and power are not wrong in themselves, but the single-minded pursuit of them always leads to distortions in people's behaviour: sin.

Fallen man's exercise of power is demonic (Rushdoony).

The Bible gives us a different approach.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus... (Phil.2:3-5).

Jesus described Israel in the 1st century as an “evil and adulterous generation...” (Mat.16:4). Consider the occasions in the Gospels when Jesus, in this unbiblical, misogynist culture, spoke (directly or indirectly) to women. His mother Mary at the wedding in Cana (Jn.2:1-5), when she comes to visit Him (Mk.3:31-35), from the cross (Jn.19:25-27), the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn.4:7-42), the woman caught in adultery (Jn.8:1-11), Mary and Martha, when Martha was frustrated with Mary (Luke 10:38-42), when Lazarus died (Jn.11:1-46), and at Jesus' tomb (Jn.20:9-18), the woman with a haemorrhage (Mat.9:20-22); the Syrophenician woman (Matt.15:21-28); and the daughters of Jerusalem (Luke 23:26-31).

Jesus endorsed their faith in God. On one occasion when a dead man was resurrected, he was the only son of a widow (Luke 7:11-17). He invariably looked after the best interests of these women.

Status and power seemed immaterial to Jesus. As the Son of God they were His, and He would receive much more at His enthronement. But He made it clear:

...The one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves (Luke 22:26-27).

What should always govern husband and wife relationships, is the motivation of godly service. The idea that this relationship should ever degenerate into some kind of power struggle, has no place in scripture. People locked into a power struggle will never serve one another.

How should we view the scriptural role of women, especially when we consider the popular notions of equality? Firstly, neither males or females are superior to one another. As the Bible says,

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave or free man, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal.3:28).

Equality of worth is not the same as equality of role, or function. Just as the Son is subject to the Father, and the Father sent the Son, the husband is responsible as the head of the family. Paul explained that "...Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ" (I Cor.11:3).

Paul, in alluding to the relationship within the Trinity, uses that relationship to explain how a husband and wife should operate. Just as there is equality of worth within the Trinity, there is equality of worth or dignity, between the husband and wife. Men are not superior to women, but in God's chain of command, He has placed husbands in authority over their wives.

As one helpful minister said:

Women are redemptively equal, functionally different.

You don't need a degree in biology to know that a man cannot fulfil a woman's role in reproduction, and neither can a woman fulfil a man's. But our differences go much deeper than that.

These differences can be frustrating to us. But what was it like for Adam and Eve in the Garden? Seeing the differences from God's perspective should lead us to understand that different does not mean wrong. On the contrary, differences challenge us to harmonise.

If the members of the orchestra cannot accept that they all have a different but valuable contribution in the performance, how will they ever produce a harmonious sound? We must learn to respect and appreciate gender differences as God designed, and not war against them as though they are some kind of evil conspiracy against our sex.

The recognition that our God-given makeups are entirely different should lead to greater understanding and appreciation for our spouse, and to this conclusion: consultation and harmony between husband and wife is the name of the game. And the Bible speaks of this:

Prepare plans by consultation, and make war by wise guidance (Prov.20:18).

Consultation requires a number of things, beginning with setting aside our pride and individualism. And there are other things required like time, patience and understanding of one another. But it pays off. When a couple are unified and of one mind, it elevates the role of both husband and wife, so that

The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life (Prov.31:11-12).

And there's more:

House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord (Prov.19:14).

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favour from the Lord (Prov.18:22).

Conclusion:

So, you really want to make headway with your wife? Do what the Bible says, and live with her "...in an understanding way." Then you'll really be able to make some good music!

Four

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either one of them falls, one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they can keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him (Ecc.4:9-12).

Individual responsibility is a godly thing, and it has to mesh or coordinate with our obligation to work with others. This needs to take place everywhere in the church, the community, at work and it has to begin in marriage.

Within marriage, everyone has to learn to work with their spouse, and there are often challenges with this. Working with your spouse can actually take a long time to work out, which can seem to be depressing. "Why all these problems?"

Well, there are lots of mistakes because some of us are slow to learn, slow to give up old habits of individualism that don't help.

Eve was his "helpmeet," to use a common term (Genesis 2:20). Actually, the King James Version never uses "helpmeet." That is a word which developed from the King James phrase, "an help meet for him." What the phrase really meant was "a helper fit for him," or better yet, "designed for him." Eve was designed to complement Adam and make his work more efficient. Adam was limited from the start, an incomplete creation, just as the earth was an incomplete creation. Adam needed Eve. He needed her to work better, enjoy life better, procreate children, and most important of all, better reflect God's image.¹

Men ought to always appreciate their wife. Of course she isn't perfect. Are you? It's a foolish thing to take her for granted. Firstly, she'll notice it, and won't appreciate it. Secondly, if you had to do without her for a month, how would you go?

In September 2007, Dr Thomas Kossman, a German trauma surgeon working at the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne, Australia since 2001, was told by the hospital's CEO, that he was under investigation for shoddy surgery, and for rorting the public purse. The allegations nearly destroyed him, and his career. He said,

¹ Gary North, "Unconditional Surrender," 2010, p.29-30.

I was on my knees. I broke down twice, which is something I don't do. I had depression, sleeping pills, weight loss-you name it, I had it. The stress was so great my wife thought I wouldn't make it.

Thomas had one great person on his side-his wife, Cristina. He said of her,

I was struggling; my wife kept me alive. She fed me, she loved me, she invited me to lunch with her...and every day she has continued to walk into that place with her head held high.

Cristina said at the time, "I am sure the sun will shine again on our family."²

Not every husband is accused or faces public ignominy like Thomas Kossman. But over the life of a marriage there are generally enough challenges, for a prudent man to realise just how much his wife can be a help to him.

Do you?

Five

In chapter 7 of Luke's Gospel, beginning at verse 36, Luke records a set of events that took place at the home of Simon the Pharisee, whom Jesus visited and dined with.

And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume (v.37-38).

The woman never spoke to anyone during her visit to Simon's home. Clearly, she is deeply appreciative of Jesus, as a result of some previous contact they've had. Near the end of the account Jesus said of her, that her actions showed that "...she loved much..." (v.47).

The Bible describes the woman as "a sinner" (v.37), and that is Simon's inner opinion about her, too (v.39). It appears that she'd previously been a prostitute, but through an earlier conversation with Jesus, she became one of the few people in the gospels of whom Jesus said, "Your sins have been forgiven" (v.48). Her actions in Simon's home were an outcome of this.

Why should this Gospel account be particularly important to husbands? Paul explains:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing... (Eph.5:25-27).

Let's be perfectly clear: there can only ever be one Saviour of the world-Jesus Christ. But husbands are to follow His example, in treating their wife in the same way that our Lord did

² "The Weekend Australian Magazine," August 16-17, 2008, p.18. Kossman was later exonerated.

this woman. In relation to His church, Christ “gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her...” He concluded it was better to do this, than to leave her in her present state of sin. And in relation to this woman, Jesus’ care for her had changed her life.

A husband’s first responsibility towards his wife therefore, is to put her protection, welfare and care before his own desires. This requires that husbands submit themselves to God’s will. They are to effectively say to God concerning their wife, “Not my will but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

Paul expands on this thought in another passage:

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbour for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself... (Ro.15:1-3).

For a husband to “not please himself,” means that he must treat his wife as though she is more important than himself. His wishes in life are to be secondary to what is right and best for her. If this is what Jesus has done for His bride, shouldn’t we do the same?

Taking a lead from Jesus’ example, a very big part of a husband’s care and love for his wife, is centred around his use of words. Paul, speaking of Christ’s example, refers to “...the washing of water by the word...”

Apart from His death on the cross, Jesus’ ministry was primarily through His use of words. Therefore, in order to minister to their wife, husbands must:

- a) Become familiar with the Word of God.
- b) Lovingly teach and instruct their wife in that Word.

Peter encourages us that “Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God...” (I Pet.4:11).

After ministering to the Samaritan woman, Jesus was invited by the Samaritans to visit them. He stayed there two days, and

many more believed because of His word, and they were saying to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Saviour of the world” (Jn.4:41-42).

The Bible tells us that husbands are to “live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker...” (I Pet.3:7). Being weak is not sinful, but it shows that a person is vulnerable, and it is always Christian to strengthen the weak.

The Lord God has given me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens my ear to listen as a disciple (Isa.50:4).

Conclusion:

We husbands are to strengthen and encourage our wives, from scripture. That requires our time, our patience and love, just as it did with Jesus, with the woman who visited Him at Simon’s house.

Her life had been turned around, through a conversation. Could your wife's life be turned around too through her relationship with you, as a faithful servant of Jesus Christ?

Six

Every household and every person needs help to get things done. I agree with the statement that

A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do, but he needs his wife to help him,

but it's only a part of the story. It's also been said that

A woman's work is never done,

and this is just as relevant. Where am I going with this?

Husbands need the help of their wife, but busy wives may need the help of their husband too, to get their tasks completed. Marriage is a two-way street, whereby each assists the other.

We're having visitors for lunch today, and I've got things I want to do, in terms of some writing. I think these are important, and I need to do these. So far, so good.

But what about what my wife needs to do, too? Is she able to cope with the house and food preparations, by herself?

Let's be practical. Sue works part-time with me, and this can be between 2 and 5 days a week. When it's 5, there is more to be done to ensure the household tasks get done, and nothing gets omitted, so she needs my help.

I think a man ought to be willing to help his wife in her tasks, and never think it is somehow beneath him. That's pride, not godliness. Yes, he has a role to lead and direct his home, but her work sometimes needs his assistance to take a load off her, so that she isn't floundering.

Thirty years ago, a friend of mine claimed that he didn't believe in doing "women's work," whatever that is. He never did marry, though he had an opportunity. Was there a connection?

Christianity is highly service oriented. Jesus Christ is called "My servant..." by God (Isa.42:1). Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, and later went and died for them all. Paul instructed us, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus..." (Phil.2:5). So, wise husbands (like all good leaders) are happy to lead through service.

The smooth functioning of any household requires the participation of every member, to get things done efficiently, and there can be overlap of responsibility. I don't think of myself as superior to Sue, as though all help should be directed to me, only. That's how tyrants and abusers operate, and I don't want to be in that company.

She is not to be my slave or door-mat, but all of us need to bear in mind the Biblical command,

...through love serve another (Gal.5:13).

My fellow husband, is that what you do, too? It's the servants who get things done in the kingdom of God.

Seven

Christians really ought to be authoritative people as they operate in their sphere in life. The Christian mother ought to be able to complete her tasks competently and quickly, and with her husband be able to train and oversee her children in the home, so that their necessary tasks are completed well, on time and happily. This is the woman Proverbs 31 describes. When this is something we've mastered, God can add more responsibility to us, and He probably will.

But being authoritative and being authoritarian are different things, and the difference always begins in attitude. You can be authoritative in your sphere without being the boss, but you may be! It's always pleasant working with someone who knows what they are doing, and who can include others in the process in an enjoyable way. Whether it's changing a wheel on the tractor or preparing a fruit-salad for twenty people to enjoy, it's no problem.

But the authoritarian person wants to be in charge, and he (or she) really likes giving the orders. He has a problem with power: he loves it! And he'll use it, but not with the best interests at heart of those around him, but with a self-centred, ulterior motive.

This always creates problems and ill-feeling. People know there is something wrong, even if they can't quite put their finger on it.

The problem is not power, but how it's used. Power can be used in a constructive, helpful way to assist and serve people, or it can be used to hurt and harm. This is the way that tyrants work. "Put me in charge, and I'll fix everything!" But their real focus is typified by Adonijah, who wanted to usurp the throne from his half-brother, Solomon. Adonijah was an upstart who exalted himself, saying "I will be king" (I Kings 1:5).

Around 700 BC, the Bible predicted through Isaiah concerning Jesus, that "...the government will rest upon His shoulders..." (Isa.9:6). Why is this not a threat or a problem to us? Because of the kind of man Jesus was and is. This is why the Bible commands us in relation to others, to "...have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil.2:5).

The Bible says that Jesus today has "all authority..." (Mat.28:18). Why is that? Because He was more concerned to responsibly and faithfully serve His Heavenly Father on earth, than to grasp authority. He said "...I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (Jn.8:29). So He is absolutely authoritative, but He was never authoritarian. Jesus' treatment of women in the gospels especially exemplifies this.

Every Christian husband ought to be afraid to ever be authoritarian in his home. It is utterly inconsistent with the kingdom of God, and a form of abuse. Rather, we should flee from it.

Does this mean that Christian men become a sanitised bunch of milk-sops, weak, indecisive and unwilling to fight and confront evil? Not at all. That's what some foolish and irresponsible preachers have taught now for generations, but in doing so, they've rejected the Bible, which says

*The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are as bold as a lion
(Prov.28:1).*

It also says,

Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong (I Cor.16:13).

Four hundred years ago, preachers didn't teach that kind of unbiblical, feminised nonsense.

Sue and I had first-hand experience with an authoritarian leader. He was the pastor of our church for 17 years, till 1990. In that year, he was exposed as a serial adulterer, forced by the elders to resign, and died of a brain tumour a year later. We later discovered he'd been a misogynist; he thought men were superior to women, which the Bible nowhere teaches. His resignation gave us the opportunity to reflect on what constitutes true, godly leadership, as opposed to the false and ungodly.

The Bible shows us that the church is like a woman, as it is typified as the bride of Christ. She is the ultimate First Lady. And as such, it can easily be abused and taken advantage of, if its members do not stand up and reject the hirelings, thieves and wolves that frequently appear in its midst, that want to enslave and prey upon God's people. Pharoah wanted Sarai for his wife (Gen.12:14-20), as did Abimelech (Gen.20:1-18), and Abimelech wanted Rebekah (Gen.26:6-11).

These Genesis accounts serve as forerunners to the Exodus, which is a glorious account of God dealing with and ultimately drowning an abusive, authoritarian tyrant who had stolen and enslaved God's bride, Israel.³ Scoundrels have been around a long time, and nothing is going to change in that regard, anytime soon.

Conclusion:

Jesus Christ shows us that power can be used in a God-honouring, responsible and constructive way, which is what Christians should always try to achieve. And in the context of the home, the family, the church and even civil government, this can and should have a satisfying and joyful result, which Jesus also indirectly predicted: "...You will find rest for your souls" (Mat.11:29).

Is that what you want, too?

Eight

³ *God's deliverance of His bride from Egyptian "rape" is the theme of Exodus. (Ex.1:16, 22. Compare the previous exoduses of Abraham from Egypt and Philistia, and of Isaac from Philistia: in each case, the bride was under attack; Gen. 12, 20, 26.)* James Jordan, "Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy," 1989, p.12.

When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army nor be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken (Deut.24:5).

This text makes it clear that a husband's presence, love, protection and security of his wife and family is more important than his protection and security of the nation of which he is a part, at least for his first year of marriage.

Why is this?

Individual families are more important than nations, because healthy nations are built upon and depend upon healthy families to survive. What use is it, if a nation perpetually has thousands of men under arms, but those men have effectively deserted and are neglecting their wives and families, exposing them to the harm that stems from their continual absence, or death?

This is a mistake that political leaders make repeatedly, even those who claim to be conservative, and say they believe in "family values." Because power is generally their end, they overlook the importance of the individual, the family and the church, the true foundation stones that healthy nations are built upon.

The Bible repeatedly makes it clear that healthy leadership of the church is contingent upon men who have shown they have succeeded in their family. Their example is very important in the church. Paul explains that

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)... (I Tim.3:2-5).

And there's more. The Bible is not a misogynist document; though husbands do have authority over their wife, men are not innately superior to women, and the abuse, dismissal or contempt for women in any form (in sharp contrast to the Islamic religion), has no basis in scripture. On the contrary, the care and consideration towards women and wives particularly, which Moses teaches in Deuteronomy, is later reflected in Paul's writings as well:

...One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided... (I Cor.7:32-34).

Only a fool is dismissive or contemptuous of his wife's views. Being weaker does not imply inferiority on her part. And this theme of the deeply personal aspect of a husband's responsibility towards his wife is illustrated in other places with Paul:

So husbands ought to also love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church (Eph.5:28-29).

Derek Prince commented on this passage:

The two words nourish and cherish suggest an attitude of intimate concern that includes attention to what might appear to be small details. A husband should be concerned about his wife's health, her appearance, the way she does her hair, the perfume she uses. Everything that concerns her should concern him. She should always have the confidence that to her husband she is the most important person in the world.⁴

I had the opportunity to be tested on this today. We were out, and we'd decided to buy some fish for tea, from the other side of a 4 lane road in Brisbane, speed limited to 70kph. I'd decided to wait for a gap and run across 2 lanes, wait on the median strip for another gap, then go across the next two to the fish shop, repeating the process to get back to the car. But Sue thought it was too risky with people were rushing home from work, and that she'd really prefer me to drive down the road, do a U-turn and park, buy the fish, do another U-turn and go home.

My first thought was, "That's unnecessary. I'll be able to get across those lanes easily." But she was concerned for me: she made it clear that she'd be much happier if I did it her way. And so I thought, "All right. I don't need to be the Macho Man here, and do something silly, which has an element of danger. I'll take the extra 3 minutes it will take to drive."

Conclusion:

Independence and a male's egotistical sense of superiority don't make a marriage work. On the contrary, it causes tensions and drama. The Bible's emphasis is entirely different, emphasising relationship, companionship and the interdependence of husband and wife, for life. "The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain" (Prov.31:11).

My fellow husband, is that your approach, too?

Nine

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Mat.11:28-30).

We Christians know that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world, but He is much more than that. He is the greatest example of leadership in history, and godly husbands can and must apply His example in caring for their wife and family.

And let us be warned about this: His lessons are not just academic, for they will require that we change. Why is that?

Paul warns each of us "...not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think..." (Ro.12:3). The human heart since Adam, has an infinite capacity for pride, arrogance, vanity and self-deception. Because of the sin of the human heart, all of us are susceptible to these traits.

And let's face it: there is nothing more Satanic than pride. God said that,

⁴ Derek Prince, "Husbands and Fathers," 2000, p.31-32.

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate (Prov.8:13).

The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people, is really (among other things) His unceasing war against pride in our hearts. In us husbands, His war against our pride manifests in our relationship with our wife. And this gets messy and painful if we don't respond to the work of the Holy Spirit.

A husband's authority over his wife is not a licence to do as he wishes; that quickly becomes a form of tyranny. Rather, we are to "...through love serve one another" (Gal.5:13).

When Rehoboam became king of Israel after his father Solomon, he sought advice from the elders who had served his father, concerning how he should rule. Their advice should ring down through the ages, for every wise leader:

If you will be a servant to this people today, and will serve them and grant them their petition, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever (I Kings 12:7).

But Rehoboam refused to do so. He preferred the arrogant advice of the young men who had grown up with him. Consequently, he lost most of his kingdom (v.16-19), all because of a flawed attitude towards his leadership.

But Rehoboam's grandfather David, was different. When his wife Michal realised her father Saul wanted to kill him, she said to him,

...If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be put to death (I Sam.19:11).

Did he argue with her? No, he got the message. She let him out through a window, and he escaped (v.12).

If a husband is serious about this, he should ensure that his wife has the freedom to say what she wants to him, regardless of whether it conflicts with his attitudes and decisions. Yes, he's in charge all right, but the Captain on the bridge needs to know exactly how the stokers down in the boiler-room are going, and what they are really thinking and why, otherwise he might be about to lose command of his boat.

She needs to be able to say what she wants, with No Holds Barred. Could that be rough on his pride and ego? Absolutely, because that's where God's sanctification process, His war on this man's pride, is going to manifest.

This might lead to a lot of things coming out of the wood-work. Suppressed resentment and ill-feeling over decisions that might have been there for decades, all of a sudden spilling out and seeing the light of day.

That could be embarrassing and humbling for a husband, but that's all part of him loving and caring for his wife, and providing an opportunity for her to say what she wants, without there being recriminations on his part towards her. It's not destructive, just challenging to his ego and attitude.

And if she decides, "This is my chance to really give him a piece of my mind for all those stupid decisions he's made..." and turns on him, and it goes on for an hour before she decides

she's had enough, this might be the best things he's done, and an opportunity for this couple to begin again, on a proper and honest foundation.

When there is a lot of dirty, rusty water in the bottom of the boiler, the wise engine driver had better open the tap and let it all come out. It won't do any good in there. Then he can replace it with the fresh.

The facts of life are not always easy or comfortable; truth can be painful, but it is still necessary that we face it, whether we like it or not. And husbands must lead the way in this. As the family member with the most authority and responsibility, we must be the first in the family to face the painful truth from those we lead, especially if it is unappealing to us.

All of us make mistakes, but not all of us will admit to those mistakes, and if we hide behind a position of authority, saying to our wife, "You can't tell me that, because you're only my wife, and you're supposed to submit to me," we only make ourselves look fearful, insecure and pathetic. And nothing of that is remotely Christian or God-honouring.

For the Bible has all the answers for us:

Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; it is oil upon my head; do not let my head refuse it... (Ps.141:5).

Conclusion:

Jesus Christ shows us that good leadership is essentially another aspect of godly service. It can be accomplished best by those who are "...gentle and humble of heart..."

If they are wise, husbands will learn from Jesus Christ, giving those under their authority (especially their wife), the freedom and opportunity to speak their mind on any subject. This is not evil on her part, for it provides her with the opportunity to "get some things off her chest," which he probably needs to pay careful attention to. It is an aspect of loving, serving and caring for her. It might just save his marriage, or even his life.

Fellow husband, is that what you want, too?

The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honour and life (Prov.22:4).