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BIBLE TEACHER'S GUIDE: BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR A GODLY MARRIAGE: A PRE-MARRIAGE, MARRIAGE COUNSELING STUDY

FROM THE SERIES:

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STUDY

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2. Foundation Two: Gender Roles In Marriage

In this session, we will discuss God’s roles for the husband and wife in the marriage union.

Why are gender roles so important in marriage? For one, God designed marriage, and when people do not follow his design, the marriage is destined for problems. It is important for us to know and follow his design, even when it is countercultural or contrary to what we are accustomed to.

We can discern the importance of gender roles by considering the first marriage in the Garden of Eden. Gender roles was essentially the first thing Satan attacked leading to the Fall. By tempting Eve instead of Adam, Satan was manipulating her to usurp the authority God had established. The Fall happened when Adam followed Eve who was deceived by Satan ([Genesis 3:1-6](#)).

God’s original intention was for the husband to lead the marriage, which can be clearly discerned from Scripture. In this lesson, we will establish the husband’s authority by looking at the creation narrative

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Let's first start with a biblical foundation for male leadership. How do we see this established in the creation story?

God Created Adam Before Eve to Demonstrate His Authority.

In the creation story, God first made Adam and then Eve as his helper. [Genesis 2:18](#) says, "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'"

In 1 Timothy 2, Paul used the creation order as evidence for men being the leaders/teachers in the church and not women. Look at what he said in [1 Timothy 2:12-13](#): "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve."

Some have tried to explain away Paul's teaching on male leadership in the church as simply cultural and, therefore, not applicable to the church today. However, Paul's argument for male leadership was not just a cultural argument. Paul used a creation argument for the establishment of male leadership, meaning that God established this order from the beginning. Certainly, in the ancient culture, birth order was very important. The first born child would often receive a double portion of the inheritance. Birth order showed one's rank. Similarly, Paul said God's creation of Adam first was not haphazard but by sovereign design. It was meant to show his leadership in relation to his wife.

God established the husband's authority in the home from the beginning of creation, and Paul's argument was that this authority should continue to be reflected in God's church.

In what other ways do we see the husband's authority reflected in the creation story?

Adam's Naming of His Wife Demonstrated His Authority

Another evidence of God's original design for male leadership in the home is demonstrated in the fact that Adam named his wife. We see Adam's naming of his wife in two parts. First, in [Genesis 2](#), God called for Adam to name all the animals. After naming them, God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, and, from his body, God created Adam's wife. Then Adam immediately named her. [Genesis 2:23](#) says, "The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.'" As Adam originally named the animals, he then named his wife "woman." Secondly, after the Fall, he then called her "Eve" because she would be the mother of all the living ([Gen 3:20](#)).



Gender Roles Were Perverted in the Fall

In the Fall, Satan tempted Eve to eat from the forbidden tree. Scripture actually says that Eve was deceived but not Adam. [First Timothy 2:14](#) says, “Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.” Why does it say that Adam was not deceived but the woman was?

Remember, in the context of [1 Timothy 2](#), Paul is making the argument that women should not be the leaders/teachers in the church (cf. 2:12). He seems to be making the argument that the Fall happened because Adam willingly followed his wife instead of being the leader God had called him to be. Eve was deceived, and Adam followed even though he knew it was wrong. Satan’s temptation disrupted God’s original order.

With that said, let’s consider the effects of the Fall on gender roles in marriage. God said this about the effects, “To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you’” ([Gen 3:16](#)).

What did God mean when he said to the woman, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you”? The meaning is ambiguous, but it is made clearer by considering the use of the Hebrew word “desire” in other texts

In [Genesis 4:7](#), God used the same word to describe “sin” trying to dominate Cain and provoke him to anger over God’s acceptance of Abel’s offering. Listen to what God said to Cain:

Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.’

Here the word “desire” means to control, and thus, we can understand the effect of sin on the distinct roles of the husband and wife (or man and woman). The wife would try to control the husband, and the husband would try to dominate the wife. The battle of the sexes was one of the results of the Fall.

We have seen these effects throughout history in many ways. In some cultures, the husbands are apathetic, spiritually lazy, and sometimes absent, consequently the wife has to lead the home. In others, the husband tries to dominate by force and the woman has very few rights. The domination of the male has been seen in the fight for women’s rights throughout history. Many societies abuse women and treat



We certainly see the effects of sin in the dating realm. It is displayed in the predatory male who wants to dominate and sleep with as many women as possible. It is also displayed in the predatory female who seeks to control men with her beauty and use them to attain all of her desires.

Most importantly, we see this battle in the home, where the husband and wife strive for power—marring God's original design. God is a God of order; he understood that the institution of marriage could not function properly if it did not have clear leadership. This is true with any institution: the military, business, school, and even church. Therefore, God intended for the husband to be the leader in order to achieve his original purposes through marriage.

Obviously, this teaching is controversial. People seem to believe order and leadership in marriage means inequality. However, this is not true. A general and a private are equal in person but not equal in rank. Rank is needed to bring about good order and discipline in the military. Leadership is needed to accomplish the mission without discord. Similarly, God has a great mission for every marriage. It is the basic unit of all society, and when it is out of order, all of society is out of order. Therefore, he established clear leadership for this purpose.

Now, with that said, what should the husband's leadership look like practically? What should the wife's submission look like? The husband is not supposed to be a dominate tyrant and the wife is not called to be a doormat. In the beginning, God called Adam and Eve to rule and steward creation together. This loving and orderly partnership was meant to accomplish God's mission on the earth.

What should the husband's and wife's roles look like in marriage? Personality and upbringing make each godly home different, but the basic roles and principles should be the same.

The Husband Must Love His Wife

Instead of using his leadership to control or dominate his wife, God calls the husband to use his leadership to love his wife. God planned this from the beginning. The husband would lead through loving his wife. What should this love look like? Paul teaches that the husband's love should mirror Christ's love for the church. In [Ephesians 5:25-28](#), he says:

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, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.



The husband should have no fantasies about the woman he is marrying (v. 25). Christ loved the church, but he knew she was sinful and disobedient. Christ gave his life for the church while knowing her faults. His love was realistic.

In marriage, both mates must grasp this reality. In fact, much of pre-marital counseling is destroying the false expectations set up through romantic comedies and Hollywood. The husband must love realistically. This woman does not walk on water; she has been infected by sin just as he has. She must be reformed daily by God's grace, and she must be loved through her faults. Scripture says, "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). Having a realistic love is important for both mates because if they don't have it, they will become disillusioned. No doubt, one of the reasons for such a high number of divorces in the first year of marriage is because most love is not realistic.

2. The husband's love must be sacrificial.

He is to love her as Christ loved the church and be willing to die for her (v. 25). It should be understood that if anybody feels like the wife's role is unfair, they should give more thought to the man's. It is much easier to submit to someone than to give one's life for that person. This love that the husband is supposed to embody is impossible apart from the grace of God. To love sacrificially means the husband must often give up other things in order to serve and please his wife. He must sacrifice for her. He must sacrifice time, friendships, career, entertainment, hobbies, etc., in order to love his wife like Christ.

3. The husband's love must be purposeful.

The purpose of Christ's love is to make the church holy, cleansing her by washing with the Word (v. 26-27). Christ's purpose is to make the church a perfect bride. Similarly, the husband must love his wife through teaching her Scripture, getting her involved in a Bible preaching church, and encouraging her to get involved with the ministries of the church.

He must seek to cultivate not only her character but also her calling, so she can fulfill God's plans for her life. He must help her discern her gifts and talents and encourage her in the use of them for the glory of God. This purposeful love also means at times admonishing her to help her know Christ more. Every man should consider if he is ready and willing to love a woman in this way even before getting married. Is he ready to be a spiritual leader? Is he ready to be devoted to the spiritual development of his wife?

4. The husband's love must be personal.

He must love her as his own body (v. 28). Every day the husband brushes his teeth, combs his hair, and



When the world hears the phrase “male leadership,” it often has negative connotations, but it should not if properly understood. Consider what Christ taught his disciples about leadership in [Luke 22:25-27](#).

Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.’

As described in [Luke 22](#), male leadership primarily means greater service. Christ told his disciples that whoever wanted to be the greatest must be like “the youngest.” The Jewish culture was very hierarchical, meaning that the youngest would always serve the oldest. But, Jesus spoke to this hierarchical culture and said that true leadership is servant leadership. To lead means to be like the youngest—the servant of all. True leaders will forego their right of being served in order to serve others. That’s how husbands should be in marriage. They should be constantly humbling themselves in order to serve their wives.

Christ demonstrated this leadership in [John 13](#), when he did the work of a slave by washing his disciples’ feet. There is nothing negative about this type of leadership. God always intended this type of loving leadership for the marriage relationship, and the husband must daily seek to cultivate it.

What other traits should characterize gender roles in marriage?

The Husband Must Submit to Christ’s Leadership

[First Corinthians 11:3](#) says: “Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”

In this verse, we see the divine prerogative: Christ submits to God, the man submits to Christ, and the woman submits to man. If the husband is going to lead his wife according to God’s design, he must first submit to Christ. It is for this reason that a wife must submit to her husband, for when she is following her husband, she is really submitting to Christ’s delegated authority.

This brings a grave responsibility to each husband to know Christ’s leading. He must truly be somebody who abides in God’s Word and prayer so that he can discern God’s voice. The man considering marriage should ask himself “Am I nursing the Lord in such a way that I can know his voice in order to lovingly



This is also important for single women to hear and consider because not every man is spiritually fit for leadership. They should ask themselves about a potential husband, “Does this man love Christ? Is this man following Christ? Is he spiritually fit to lead?” One can be sure that if a single man is not faithful in following Christ, he will not be faithful when married. Scripture says that he who is unfaithful with little, will be unfaithful with much ([Luke 16:10](#), paraphrase). Husbands must continually be submitting to the leadership of Christ in order to properly lead their homes.

The Wife Must Submit to Her Husband’s Leadership

As mentioned previously, in submission to Christ, the wife must submit to her husband. [Ephesians 5:22](#) says, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.”

Scripture commands the wife to submit to her husband as though she were following Christ. The word “submit” is a military word that means to “come up under.” Like a sergeant submitting to a colonel, the wife must submit to her husband in every area, unless it would cause her to disobey her Commander and Chief, Christ. In every decision, the woman must obey her husband, unless his leadership is leading her to sin. In military terminology, this would be called an “unlawful order.” The wife must wisely discern this.

With that said, this certainly does not exclude the wife’s ability to make decisions on her own. Christ in leading us gives us many responsibilities and a form of autonomy under his authority. In following Christ, he often does not tell us to go to the left or to the right or when to rest. Scripture calls for us to be wise people and use the principles given in Scripture. Similarly, the wife may have many areas of leadership under her husband’s authority.

For some, the wife will be autonomous in the area of caring for the home, even though she is still under her husband’s leadership. For others, the wife will oversee finances. Good leaders recognize others’ strengths and lean on them in those areas. This will be true in every marriage, and it may look a little different in every marriage.

This may be a revolutionary concept that a newly married woman must come to grips with. No longer is it simply, “Am I honoring the Lord in my actions and endeavors?”, but also “Am I honoring my husband, who the Lord has called me to follow?”

Consider the honor given to Sarah because of the way she submitted to her husband, Abraham.

[First Peter 3:5-6](#) says this:



him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

Sarah called her husband master, and Scripture says this is one of the characteristics that makes a woman beautiful to the Lord. A female considering marriage must ask herself, “Am I ready to honor and submit to my husband as unto the Lord? Am I willing to submit to his plans as he hears from God?” The one who is not willing to submit should consider if she is really ready to be married.

The Wife Must Submit to Christ’s Leadership

Again, [Ephesians 5:22](#) says, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.” Not only does this teach that wives must submit to their husbands, but the implication is that they must first submit to the Lord. The husband is just a representation of Christ’s leadership, no matter how frail that representation may be. It is in submitting to Christ, abiding in his Word, and loving him that the wife will find the ability to submit to her husband. This will be especially true in dealing with a husband who doesn’t know the Lord or who is far from him. [First Peter 3:1-2](#) says this:

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

The husband’s leadership applies even when he isn’t following God. In that case, the wife’s submission to Christ is even more important. By submitting to Christ, she will find ability to love and submit to a difficult husband and this submission may bring transformation and even salvation to his life. However, this is only possible when the wife is submitting to the Lord. Jesus said in [John 15:5](#), “Abide in me and you will produce much fruit” (paraphrase). The ability to love, to have peace, to have patience, to forgive, etc., all comes from God.

The single woman considering marriage must ask herself, “Am I daily submitting to the Lord’s leadership so I can faithfully submit to my husband’s leadership?” This daily submission to the Lord prepares a woman for marriage.

Also, the single man considering marrying a female must ask, “How is her submission? Does she faithfully submit to the Lord? Is she faithful in church attendance, daily devotion, and service to God?” For if she does not submit to the greater, the Lord, then she will not submit to the lesser, her husband. A wise man will consider a woman’s obedience to God when seeking a wife. God has called for the wife to



[Ephesians 6:4](#) says, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” “Fathers” can also be translated “parents” (cf. Aramaic Bible in Plain English).

This means that both parents must work together to train the child and not exasperate him—leading him to rebel by dominant, loose, or unfair leadership. Parents must demonstrate godly leadership that models Christ, teaches the children God’s Word, and draws them to a closer relationship with the Lord.

This is an impossible task for one parent alone and that is why God has given spiritual responsibility to both. The husband should still ultimately oversee this training, but the responsibility is shared. For that reason, parents must come to an agreement on how to train the child. If there is no unity in the training, it will have hazardous effects on the child.

Godly couples must sit down and discuss how this will be done. This will include discipline, spiritual training, academic training, athletic training, and areas of service, among other things. For spiritual training, many parents have given themselves to child catechisms, Bible memory, daily family devotions, as well as involvement in a Bible preaching church.

Sadly, what has happened in many Christian homes is that this call for the parents to train their children has been left to the church, the school, the grandparents, the babysitter, the athletic coach, etc. God never intended for these other mediums to raise the children exclusively; they should be supplements at best. Consequently, 75% of Christian youth fall away from God when they get to college because many parents have neglected their responsibility.

Engaged couples should consider their future children’s training before they are married, since raising godly seed is one of God’s primary desires for the marriage union (cf. [Mal 1:15](#)). Have you given consideration to how you will train your children?

Conclusion

The Fall corrupted God’s original design for the husband and the wife. Because of sin, the husband naturally has a tendency to try to dominate his wife or to become a doormat for his wife. The tendency for the wife is the same. However, God’s plan is for the husband to love and serve his wife and for the wife to submit to him. They both have a responsibility to raise the children in the admonition of the Lord. But, ultimately, the husband will be held accountable to God for his leadership or lack of leadership over his family.



1. What was new or stood out to you in this session? In what ways were you challenged or encouraged? Were there any points/thoughts that you did not agree with?

2. Often when beginning a marriage, spouses bring in different unspoken expectations. These frequently become points of discouragement and tension in the relationship. Discussing expectations beforehand will aid in making a smooth transition into marriage.

What were the gender roles in your home? What role did your father fulfill in family devotions, discipline of children, finances, yard work, cleaning the house, etc.? What role did your mother fulfill?

3. List twenty expectations for your spouse in marriage such as: Who will do the house chores? What is your expectation for your spouse as far as spiritual devotion? What is your expectation for your spouse in the clothing he or she wears? What will you do for holidays? What side of the family will you spend Christmas, Thanksgiving, etc., with? How do you expect money and major decisions to be handled? Who will discipline the children?

4. Write down ten expectations that you think your spouse will have for you.

5. Discuss these with your mate and come to an agreement on the expectations that you will each fulfill. List the expectations that you have agreed on. Write them with this form,

"I will commit to _____ in our marriage with the support of my wife/husband and by the grace of God."

6. After completing this session, in what ways do you feel God is calling you to pray for your future marriage? Spend some time praying.

¹ The following point headings were adapted from Bruce Goettsche's sermon on [Colossians 3:18-19](#),

Marriage God's Way, accessed 3/22/15. <http://www.unionchurch.com/archive/090698.html>.

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