

ing husband sees his wife as God's gift to him even if she is not perfect.

Love Her Calling—Supportive Love
If a wife's greatest calling is to be submissive to her husband (Col. 3:18), a loving husband helps his wife to be submissive. Some wives never learn biblical submission because their husbands rarely set a positive example. They fight against the council of the church. They speak blasphemously of civil authorities. They complain about their employer's policies. Yet they demand full submission from their wives. God says, all men must submit to proper authority (Rom. 13:1). You can hardly help your wife do this if you aren't doing it yourself.

Love Her Maker—Theological Love
Ultimately, we are bitter and loveless because we love ourselves more than we love God and are dissatisfied with God's provision. This means that the more you love God the better equipped you will be to truly love your wife.

By his matchless grace, God draws us to love him and empowers us to love others. Matthew Henry notes that the epistles which focus most on the glory of divine grace, and the majesty of the Lord Jesus, "are the most particular...in pressing the duties of the several relations." The gospel is the good news that the Son of God "loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Christ loves the whole Christian—heart, mind, body, soul—and every other part. Only as we come to terms with what that means will we be able to obey God's word. "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them."



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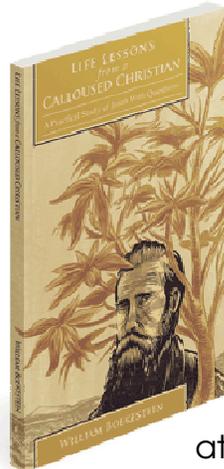


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PROCLAMATION

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AFFECTIONATE INITIATIVE

A CALL FOR LOVING, LEADING HUSBANDS

BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

Recently, our family was walking on the beach when one of the kids ran up to me with a clam shell. "Dad, I found a pearl!" she shouted. Unfortunately, she assumed that every shell contained a pearl. Her disappointment over the truth of the matter was palpable. "I thought I was rich," she lamented.

Suppose she had found a pearl. She would have been extremely excited—at first. But, inevitably, over time, the excitement would wane; the pearl might be taken for granted.

Sadly, this is often what happens when a man finds a wife. Proverbs 31 says a virtuous wife is like a rare and costly ruby. Almost literally, some men sell everything to buy the "pearl of great price" (Matt. 13:45). But in time that jewel becomes neglected. What at one time excited, now bitterly disappoints.

I cannot think of a single other social arrangement which produces as much disappointment as marriage. It is not shocking today to hear about people who divorce within the first year of marriage. What a far cry from the grand and glorious ideas the couple had about marriage! They thought marriage would make them happy—just like people think buying new jewelry will make them happy.

One reason marriages disappoint is that, instead of loving their wives as the Bible requires them to, husbands treat their wives with bitterness (Col. 3:19). They fail to live up to their calling as covenant heads following the example of Christ, the head of the church (Eph. 5:23). As covenant heads, husbands ultimately bear all the responsibility in the marriage. And their responsibility is summed up in one word: Love.



The Struggle of Loving Leadership:

One of the great temptations a husband faces is to be bitter toward his wife. Bitterness and love are, in Colossians 3:19, opposite ends of the spectrum of how a husband might treat his wife.

The Temptation of Bitterness

Bitterness is the most sensitive of the tastes, and most of us find it harsh, unpleasant, and disagreeable. Case in point: Unsweetened cocoa. Do you remember the first time you discovered the shockingly harsh taste of unsweetened cocoa? It blows the mind of young children that anything bearing the brown Hershey label could taste so bad! You never find children sneaking cocoa...more than once.

Identifying relational bitterness is not as simple as a taste test. A harsh or bitter man will rarely admit it. He will call himself firm, melancholy, sober, principled or any number of pseudonyms for *bitter*. Here's the reality: Most men treat their wives' harshly. If men did not struggle with harshness God would not waste his time commanding against it. Unless you have been sanctified beyond the norm you regularly sin against your wife by bitterness.

If you are unconvinced, here are a few diagnostic tests: Does your wife enjoy spending time with you? Does she feel encouraged by you? Do you make her feel safe, physically and emotionally? Is she proud to name you as her husband? Negative answers likely have bitterness to blame.

Expressions of Bitterness

One deadly form of the special sin of husbands is secret bitterness—an under-

lying attitude of intense displeasure toward another. Secret bitterness can be related to the failures of the wife. Virtually every married man has had a pity party over his wife's sins, whether real or imagined. For some men, these pity parties are ongoing: "She has stolen my freedom. She's not the woman I married. I try so much harder than she does." Because of this attitude they fail to treat their wives with a love that expresses appreciation to God for his unique gift.

Then there is overt bitterness. Harsh men "persuade" their wives through physical, mental, or verbal strength rather than through love. They use harsh language with their wives. They treat them with a severity that others would find offensive if they could see it. This bitterness clearly fails to reflect the tender and faithful affection with which Christ loves the church (Eph. 5:25-30).

Men, you and I need to repent of our bitterness. We need to trust more fully in Christ, who as our covenant head does not treat us with the bitterness our sins deserve. As an encouragement, many men have found that when they actually began to love their wives, despite their weaknesses, she changed into a beautiful new person!

The Substance of Loving Leadership

When God says, "Husbands, love your wives," he speaks of the woman as a complex (if not complicated!) being. He calls every man to love his *whole* wife just as every man loves his whole self (Eph. 5:29). This means that a husband must do all he can to understand his wife's world. What follows are eight

admonitions to love our wives with respect to their various facets.

Love Her Heart—Emotional Love

The Bible uses the word "love" over 350 times. Almost 10% of these times are in the Song of Solomon (which comprises less than 0.5 percent of Scripture). One thing we learn from this is that a husband should use words to express his love for his wife. "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away! O my dove...let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely" (Song 2:10). I know of no woman who wouldn't love to hear her husband speak to her like that.

Love Her Mind—Intellectual Love

A loving husband graciously convinces his wife that, to him, she is the most important person in the world. By this I don't mean that he persuades her that he will never leave her. That's not good enough, of course. Does your wife know that you value her above all else?

Intellectual love also means engaging your wife's mind. Many men win the hand of their future wife by thoughtful, engaging, conversation. Too many men fail to take this habit into marriage.

Love Her Body—Physical Love

At the most basic level, by physical love a husband strives to meet his wife's physical needs. An able man who consistently chooses not to provide for the physical needs of his wife does not love her. At the same time, men must help their wives steward God's provisions in order to maximize their earnings.

Physical love is also complimentary. Your wife needn't be a supermodel to

receive regular, sincere, compliments. Physical love must be exclusive. Taking second looks at other women or carrying on about their beauty is destructive. Each man must strive to please his own wife (1 Cor. 7:3,33)

Love Her Soul—Spiritual Love

Men tend to be task-oriented. But often we neglect one of our greatest responsibilities; the cultivation of godliness in our wives. We need to become comfortable with the phrase, "as for me *and my house*" (Josh. 24:14-15). Joshua understood that as a covenant head, his choices had a profound impact of those under his care. He must always think of the spiritual good of his dependents.

This means making thoughtful, prayerful, decisions, even if they are unpopular. "We are going to church today even though that woman verbally hurt you last week. We must have family worship even with our busy schedule." These are expressions of love.

Love Her Relationships—Relational Love

For couples with children, relational love may require a husband to protect his wife from her "closest relatives." Be swift and firm to discipline children for disrespecting mom. Resist contradicting her in front of the children. Give her "time off" when necessary.

Outside of the home, develop an interest in her friends. Help her to focus on friends that are best for her.

Love Her Humanity—Realistic Love

Be tender in your wife's failures. She needs to know that you love her *even if you are* saddened by her sin. Be grateful that she is different than you. A lov-