

Several weeks ago I spoke on Paul's instruction to wives to "submit" to their husbands. I think that it is only fair that I should give equal time to the instructions that Paul gave to husbands. Since most preachers are men we tend to emphasise the responsibility of wives and pass over the instructions given to husbands to love their wives. Now you would think that if the wife's main responsibility is to submit to her husband, that the husband's main responsibility would be to give orders to his wife, to lord it over her and to force her into submission. But that's not what Paul says. "Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them." In the parallel passage in Ephesians Paul goes even farther. He writes, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for.... Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself."

As I have talked with men... and especially when I have talked with husbands... and when I examine my own heart I discover something which I believe must be a universal principle. I think that nearly all men tend to be very insecure. Scratch the surface of even the most macho men and you will find all sorts of insecurity oozing out.

Now that may be true of women also. I don't know. But I certainly feel that it's true of men, and husbands in particular. Insecurity.

I really think that most husbands fear either that their wives are dominating or will dominate them if given the slightest opportunity. Whenever I feel that my wife is trying to dominate me I tell myself, "Uh Oh! She trying to dominate me. I've got to exert my authority more. I've got to put my foot down. I've got to get tough." There is real insecurity about this and I think that most husbands share this with me. I think one of the reasons I put off getting married until I was 31 was this fear of being dominated by a woman. After all all men were once boys and as boys we were most likely raised by our mothers who exerted a tremendous power over us.

I was interested to find that Theodore Bovet agrees with me in his little book entitled, A Handbook to Marriage. He writes, "... the husband generally suffers from a feeling of inferiority to his wife.... He is, therefore, very sensitive to her criticisms-- far more so than either realizes-- and is afraid of arousing them. To avoid the possibility of criticism he often abdicates from his role of coxswain (head of the family) and hands the responsibility

over to his wife. Then he compensates for this by adopting a domineering attitude and assuming dictatorial airs. The wife, for her part, also suffers from a feeling of inferiority towards her husband; this has connections with the way she has been educated and conventions still fairly widespread. The more these feelings of inferiority have been suppressed the more she tries to compensate for them by criticism, faultfinding, and depreciation of men in general and her husband in particular."

It helps me, therefore, as a man and as a husband, to listen carefully to what Paul says in our Scripture lesson. My responsibility as a husband is not to protect or defend my authority as head of family. My responsibility as a husband is not to try to domineer my wife. My main responsibility is to love my wife and to love my wife as Christ loved the church. To love her, not if she submits to my decisions, but regardless of her submission. *Be The leader of loving in your marriage (doesn't mean wife always passive or not to be loving)... but this is no mans problem...*

When Paul told wives to submit to their husbands, he was not telling them anything new. It was well understood by both Greeks and Jews that the wife was to obey her husband. He was her lord. He was clearly the head of the house. There was nothing new in that command. The new thing that Paul and Christianity introduced was that the husband

also has responsibilities. As Ernest F. Scott has written in his commentary, Paul "is careful to lay stress on reciprocal duties. This was the great Christian innovation in the law of the family... Christianity insisted that wives... had their rights as well as husbands...." In the ancient world the woman had all the responsibilities and the man had none. But Paul changes all that. He says in the marriage relationship the husband is to love his wife. *What a weighty responsibility and duty That is.*

Helmut Thielicke, the great German preacher and theologian, has a beautiful passage in one of his books about the power of love to transform a wife. He writes, "I once knew a very old married couple who radiated a tremendous happiness. The wife especially, who was almost unable to move because of old age and illness and in whose kind old face the joys and sufferings of many years had etched a hundred runes, was filled with such gratitude for life that I was touched to the quick. Involuntarily I asked myself *what could possibly be the source of this kindly old person's radiance.* Otherwise they were very common people and their room indicated only the most modest comfort. *But suddenly I knew where it all came from,* for I saw these two speaking to each other and their eyes hanging upon each other. All at once it became clear to me that this woman was dearly loved. And it

was as if she were like a stone that has been lying in the sun for years and years, absorbing all its radiant warmth, and now was reflecting back cheerfulness and warmth and serenity. Let me express it this way. It was not because she was this kind of a cheerful and pleasant person that she was loved by her husband all those years. It was probably the other way around. Because she was so loved, she became the person I now saw before me."

But some of you may be saying, "But that's my problem. I no longer love my wife." You may have even told her. Every once in a while a minister will hear the knock on his study door. It will be a middle aged man. He will say that he no longer loves his wife. They may have been married for 20 years but he says he no longer loves her. What does one say to such a person? R.C. Sproul of the Ligonier Valley Study Center has a very blunt reply. He tells the man. "Repent." Husbands are commanded by God to love their wives. Love is primarily an action and not a feeling. Husbands have promised to love their wives. "I... take thee... to be my wedded wife; And I do promise and covenant; Before God and these witnesses; To be thy loving and faithful husband; In plenty and in want; In joy and in sorrow; In sickness and in health; As long as we

both shall live." Love is something that we promise to do.

Love is also something that we learn to do. Walter Trobisch has a beautiful little book that I highly recommend to all who are married or who are contemplating marriage. It is entitled, "Love is a feeling to be learned." Love is something that we learn. The problem with a lot of men, however, is that we have learned a lot of bad things about what it means to love. Men are supposed to be macho. ~~They~~^{we} are not supposed to be tender and loving. Love is a sign of weakness. Several years ago there was a popular song entitled, "Only women bleed." The meaning: only women really love and make themselves vulnerable to being hurt.

But love is a learned response. Men need to hear that. You can love. God created us to love. He commands us to love. Never tell yourself that you can't love and that you can't love your wife. ~~God has commanded you to love. You have promised to love and~~ you can learn to love. William James, the great psychologist and philosopher once wrote that we have far more control over our feelings than we admit. His idea was that ~~we~~ if we act lovingly, in a disciplined way, and over a period of time, then the feelings of love come. So if you really want to recapture the feeling of love you once had ~~then~~ act in loving ways toward your wife. It may be that you no longer love your wife because

you have stopped treating her with dignity and honour. You have ignored her perhaps. Perhaps you have been unfaithful to her. No one can have feelings of love for someone you treat with contempt. Don't blame your wife. Look to yourselves. You can love. You can learn to love, even if you have never loved. You can recapture that feeling of love you once had.

A man was sitting at the dinner table reading the paper. That's what he did every night for twenty some years after eating dinner silently with his wife. His wife sometimes felt that she could have just as well eaten alone. But this night, for some reason, call it the grace of God, the husband put his paper down and he saw his wife. She was standing at the sink washing the dishes with her back to him. It was as if he had not seen her for twenty years. He thought, "My, how she has changed." He remembers back to before they were married when they were young and in love. He would stare at her picture at night before he went to bed. When they were together he would look deeply into her eyes. He noticed the color of her eyes and told her how beautiful they were. He would comment on her hair and her clothing. He would tell her how much he loved her.

But then they got married. There were money worries.

There were troubles in the office. Children came along. Both he and his wife added and redistributed pounds. The television became more beautiful to watch than his wife.

And then there was the newspaper which he veiled his face with every night after dinner which hid his wife. And so it seemed like he really hadn't seen his wife for years.

But now, by the grace of God, he was seeing her once more. There she stood with her back to him washing the dishes. How long it had been since he last told her he loved her. He wonders if he still loves her. After all how can one feel much love for someone you haven't looked at for years. He had been afraid to tell her he loved her. He had always been afraid that she would manipulate him and control him if she knew he loved her. Then something within him from long ago whispered to him, "Tell her now. Tell her that you love her." Fear fills his heart. He feels the adrenalin flowing. He argues with the voice. "That would be a lie. I'm not sure I do love her anymore." "Tell her that you love her anyway. Go over there and put your arm around her waist and tell her."

Finally he tells her. "I love you." His wife turns to him, non-plussed. "What did you say?" "I love you. I... I just wanted you to know that I love you." She is suspicious. What does he want? What has he done? She doesn't know what to make of it.

Is that how you would respond if someone were to tell you they loved you... with shock, suspicion, fear, disbelief. When was the last time you looked at your wife? ~~Without--~~
~~looking-at-her~~ Can you remember what she was wearing yesterday? When was the last time you told her that you love her? When was the last time you took her out to dinner or washed the dishes for her and stayed home and took care of the kids while she got out of the house for awhile. When was the last time you noticed the color of her eyes. I know, "You're afraid you will be manipulated." You are angry because she is not submissive to you. But you see, that's not your problem. That's hers.

"Husbands, love your wives."

AMEN