

God's Design for Husbands and Wives

Some Principles

As we have said before, marriage is God's design and as a marriage is a one flesh relationship between a husband and a wife, then the both the husband and the wife have been designed to work together in a way which will make the marriage work in the way God intended. We now look at the way in which God's design for husbands and wives can be put into effect to make a marriage work well.

First, God's Design for Husbands

A good start point is Eph 5:25 where we read:- Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. NIV

So the question is "How did Christ love the church"

1 The Lord Jesus had a servant heart. He didn't come to be served but to serve. (Matt 20:28) He was a giver rather than a taker and that applied to his love. In 1 John 4:19 NIV we read:-We love because he **first** loved us. The husband is to be the one who initiates love in the home. Where there is little sign of love in a marriage you can be pretty sure the husband is at fault. That can be changed if the husband is prepared to become more like the Lord Jesus. Sincere prayer by the husband repenting of neglecting to love his wife and asking for more of God's fullness and love to flow from him into his marriage will be steps in the right direction.

2 The Lord Jesus was Meek and Humble. Meekness is power under control and is often confused with weakness – which it is not! Meekness and humility are not exactly on all fours with the typical macho, independent, selfish ambitious spirit that is supposed to typify the masculine image these days. The Lord lived to encourage, care for and strengthen others rather than adopt a selfish life style. "Looking after number one because no one else will" was not his ethos. When wives observe an encouraging and caring spirit in their husbands which flows out into the marriage, the marriage will begin to move closer to God's design and wives will cherish that.

3 The Lord never forced people to obey him by lording it over his followers. Even though He was God in the flesh, He was not bossy, manipulative or oppressive. He was not a "You just do as I say" person and never physically or verbally abused anyone. He didn't retaliate when hurt and loved even when reviled. In Philippians 2:5 NIV we read that "Your attitude [*as a husband*] *added by the writer* should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...." Pride wants to get in the way of behaving in such a Christ like manner but pride has to go. God simply doesn't use proud men effectively and that applies to a husband in his marriage relationship too.

4 The Lord had a sense of purpose. In the Ephesians passage where we began we read this:-
Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless Eph 5:25-27 NIV
 The Lord wants to see us grow into people who demonstrate his holiness as He is holy. Much of that holiness will come from taking in His word through knowing the scriptures and living out Bible principles from day-to-day so that He can present us to His Father as holy and spotless. Husbands are also to have that sense of purpose for themselves and for their wives. A Husband is to be responsible for the spiritual well being of his wife so that he can present her before his Heavenly Father as a holy, righteous and strengthened woman in love with her husband and in love with Jesus. He should pray with her, encourage her in her walk with God and be a spiritual leader in his home.

By adopting the Lord's example in all such ways, husbands will begin to bring their marriage under the umbrella of God's design and the marriage relationship will glow. There's another instruction too from the Ephesians passage. Here it is: - husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church Eph 5:28-29 NIV. Almost without exception, husbands wash, dress, feed and otherwise care for their bodies daily and they are to love their wives with the same sense of care. So, a husband should be kind, tender, loving, caring, courteous and

understanding towards his wife, for whom she is, and be understanding of her needs and responsibilities in the home. That will be shown not only in communications but in little loving kindnesses and attentions expressed in practical ways as an ongoing lifestyle. To the world, such a man might be regarded as weak-willed or wimp-like. However, the One who left such an example to follow willingly suffered scourging, beatings and finally death by crucifixion. Some weakling; some wimp!

Second, God's Design for Wives

1 Equal but Different. There is a particular equality between men and women in that they were both created by God, both are redeemed by the death of the Lord Jesus, both are children of God, both are to serve God and one another and both are "one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Within that equality, though, both men and women have their special roles designed by God.

We know from Genesis how Eve was formed from a rib taken from Adam's body and then she was given to Adam to be his helper. Her body is designed to receive her husband sexually. The wife is designed to be the receiver and her husband the giver, the initiator – the leader. In the picture of Christ and the Church we see the Lord as the leader and giver and the church as the receiver of his love and favour. That illustrates, in turn, the relationship between a bridegroom and his bride – the husband and his wife.

God has also bestowed on a wife the beautiful gift of femininity. That ability to be warmly responsive, creative and intuitive causing her to be glad to be a woman and having an inner beauty making her all the more attractive to her husband. Women who despise their femininity despise a precious gift which God has given and are putting aside a lovely characteristic which is vital to happiness and security within married life.

2 Designed to Receive Acceptance and Love The Lord Jesus spent time talking to women such as the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) even though Jews and Samaritans hated each other. He defended Mary when she was criticised by Martha for listening to Jesus and not helping with a meal (Luke 10:41) and defended her when verbally attacked by the disciples after breaking open expensive perfume and pouring it on Jesus (John 12:4). He healed a woman on the Sabbath day who had a problem with bleeding (Luke 8:44) and praised a poor widow who put all her money in the temple treasury (Luke 21:2). All that was done at a time when women were looked upon by men as mere possessions and inferior. The Lord elevated those women to their rightful place of being precious, important and loved by Him. In return it was women who supplied the Lord with daily necessities as he travelled and He received what they gave to Him. All these women received the Lord's affirmation and didn't reject His acts of kindness. Wives should follow them by receiving love, support, affirmation and acceptance from their husbands. They should not turn them away or refuse to receive such attentions in the mistaken belief that they don't need such things.

3 Submission and Respect. Submission means to be subject to someone in authority and submission is an attitude of mind applicable to all Christians, men and women alike. Again, our model is the Lord Jesus Christ who submitted voluntarily to the will of His Father and the Christian is to submit to Jesus as Saviour and Lord. For the Christian, submission – even to each other - is always out of reverence for Christ. See Eph 5:21 NIV where we read "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ". It is an essential ingredient of good relationships amongst Christians and is radical as it goes right against the world's ideas of power, authority, greatness and pride.

In the marriage relationship we read in Col 3:18-19 NIV "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them." Also in Eph 5:23-24 NIV we read "...the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

The husband is the head of the wife. For a husband to fulfil his role as a leader the wife must be prepared to be willingly in submission. However, the husband's leadership must not be harsh and overbearing. His headship must lead to a mutual flowing together of leader and follower in a loving Christ-like relationship between him and the wife he loves dearly. The wife's submission never means that she has no opportunity to put her point of view or comment. In fact it is essential that she makes her views known because her God given femininity will often enable her to see consequences not apparent to her husband. Her input in the decision making process will be invaluable

particularly when a husband has to make or confirm a course of action in difficult circumstances. Moreover, jointly made decisions in any area will help to minimise arguments if difficulties arise following the decision.

A wife should submit all her major decisions to her husband without threats or manipulation so that all such decisions can be considered and made with a “yes” or “no” made jointly. When agreement can’t be reached on an issue, it can be risky for the husband to take the line “I’m the head of the house and so what I say goes!” And the husband should never brush off his wife’s suggestions with retorts like “What a ridiculous idea” or “Trust a woman to think of a stupid thing like that!” Such an attitude would never have been seen in the life of the Lord Jesus. When the two can’t agree, it’s better to give the issue more joint consideration and prayer with a view to reaching a consensus decision one way or the other which the husband can approve - and for which he is ultimately responsible before God as head of the home.

Submission of a wife to her husband is a Christ like attitude to marriage, it strengthens the marriage relationship and helps to bring peace and security into the home. Interestingly, the world is just catching up with God’s instructions on submission. Here’s a quote from an article about a television programme in May 2007. The article is headed “I Surrender” and is about wives who have chosen to become submissive to better their marriages. One woman in the programme is quoted as saying:-

“Our first year of marriage was a living hell. My husband Frank and I argued about everything, from who was taking the rubbish out to what to watch on TV. But since I let Frank take control of every aspect of our lives, from our finances to our nights out, we don’t fight about anything. There isn’t a thing I miss about our old relationship. I truly believe that being submissive is one of the sexiest things you can do for your husband [and I never say no to sex]. When Frank walks in the room now I can feel his energy and it really gets me going. I even wear sexy clothes and make-up for him. Previously, I don’t think I’d ever worn lipstick. I just feel so lucky to have discovered the secret to a perfect marriage”

From TV Choice 5-11 May 2007 advertising a programme called Obedient Wives screened on 7 May on Channel 5.

Further Recommended Reading and on which some of the above material has been based: We Want to Restore Family Life by Donald A Kirby