

Reframing Christian marriage part 3: husbands as helpmeets.

Dalrock | 17 May, 2012 | by Dalrock

Many of my readers are already familiar with Sheila Gregoire and her blog, *To Love, Honor and Vacuum*. After looking at how big name sites like Bible.org and Ask.com reframed Biblical marriage, I was curious how faithful Sheila was in her teaching to the biblical command that wives submit to their husbands (especially given her graduate level education in women's studies). I used Amazon's search feature for her book, [To Love, Honor, and Vacuum: When You Feel More Like a Maid Than a Wife and Mother](#). I was pleasantly surprised to see her quoting the scriptural command for wives to submit to their husbands (P. 116 of the paperback):

Whether we like to be reminded of it or not, the Bible calls for wives to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22).

While she is of course understating the command by only referencing one of the many places this is commanded in the New Testament, the reference itself is there. However, what really struck me when I read a bit more before and after this line is the context she is referencing this in. The chapter is titled "The Family That Cleans Together", and the section the quote is included in is titled "Let Him Know He's Needed". The same section includes this bit of scriptural rationalization*:

Many biblical commentators think that the meaning of "the husband is the head of the wife" in Ephesians 5:23 implies something similar to "source," like the head of the river. The wife draws energy and support from her husband, and the husband finds part of his identity in supplying his wife with what she needs.

She then explains that wives who are too self sufficient are depriving their husbands of the opportunity to "fulfill their God-given role", and also rob themselves "of the gift of being cared for". She warns us that such husbands "will feel distant, perhaps like a failure", even if they can't pinpoint what the actual problem is. But what is she talking about? What exactly should wives do to avoid depriving their husbands of what they desperately need while giving themselves the gift of being cared for? After reminding women to not forget to appreciate that their husband usually works outside of the home, she advises wives to not deprive their husbands of the opportunity to do his share of the housework:

Then take the opportunity to show him he's needed at home, too. Often men feel superfluous at home, like they don't even belong, because you manage everything. Make honest requests of him that allow him to help support you and feel involved in building your home.

Note the complete inversion of the concepts of headship and help meet. In her framing, husbands were created to serve their wives and it would be cruel for wives to deprive them of the opportunity to serve her both outside of and inside the home. Further down she gives instructions on how wives should manage their husbands, including a segment titled "Delegate Appropriately for Him":

If you want your husband to take responsibility for certain chores on his own, without being asked, you need to find a delegation method that conveys to him what needs to be done without threatening him.

Leaders delegate, and she clearly sees the wife as the leader of the husband despite her lip service to the concepts of headship and submission. She follows with a table that explains how to translate straightforward requests into language husbands can understand. After the table she suggests that wives

give their husbands lists of chores:

My husband is motivated by lists. If I just tell him I would like him to help clean up after dinner, he doesn't know what to do. But if there is a list of daily and weekly chores on the fridge, and he can see what is left to be done, he's like a Tasmanian devil whirling around the house, cleaning.

*This rationalization is thoroughly debunked in [this paper](#).

See Also:

- [Reframing Christian marriage](#)
- [Reframing Christian marriage part 2: rebelling wives aren't to blame for their own rebellion.](#)
- [Reframing Christian marriage part 4: judging the performance.](#)
- [Reframing Christian marriage part 5: sex as a weapon.](#)

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