

March 17, 2013

I Peter 3:7 / Ephesians 5:21-33

Love and Respect: Asking Each To Shore Up Their Weaknesses

Today Paul summarizes the essence of the mutual, need-meeting submission he calls us to show to one another by telling the husband to, "**love his wife as he loves himself**" and telling the wife to, "**respect her husband.**"

And in doing so, I believe what Paul is doing (in his God-given wisdom): Is pointing out the wife's greatest inner need and asking the husband to seek to meet it in the way he treats, interacts and responds to her and pointing out the husband's greatest inner need and asking his wife to seek to meet it in the way she treats, interacts and responds to him.

Love and respect -- a woman desires and needs love and a man desires and needs respect. And the couples who figure that out, and get these two truths drilled into their heads and their hearts, will have internalized one of the most fundamental keys to a healthy and happy marriage.

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In fact, Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, who wrote the extremely helpful book, "Love and Respect," says this: "**For more than twenty years I had the privilege of studying the Bible thirty hours a week for my pulpit ministry. I also earned a PhD in family studies and a masters in communication, but when this illumination from [Eph. 5:33 about love and respect] exploded in my heart and mind one day in 1998, I literally exclaimed, "Glory to God!"... I had read that verse many times. I had even preached on that verse when conducting marriage ceremonies. But somehow I had never seen... [that] Paul is clearly saying that wives need love and husbands need respect.**"  
(Dobson: Had taught "Love/Love" instead of Love/Respect)

Yet, after sharing how this principle works in many seminars and conferences, he says, people would come to him and say: "**This Love and Respect Connection sounds good, but isn't it a bit theoretical? We have REAL problems -- money problems, sex problems, problems with how to raise the kids...**"

To which he responded: ***"The Love and Respect Connection is the key to ANY problem in marriage. This is not just a nice little theory to which I added a few Bible verses. How the need for love and the need for respect play off one another in marriage has EVERYTHING to do with the kind of marriage you will have."***

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And thus, what I'd like to do today is try and flesh out what all this looks like in the marriage relationship, **FIRST**, by emphasizing that marital harmony is **NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE** to sustain when the husband's need for respect and the wife's need for love are not being met.

A WIFE will find it especially hard to respect her husband if he is not loving her and a HUSBAND will find it extremely hard to love his wife if she is disrespecting him. In fact, many (if not most) marital friction, or conflicts, or disputes or arguments, can be traced back (in the end) a husband failing to show his wife the love she needs, or a wife failing to show her husband the respect he needs.

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And you know what I find interesting in all this? My 26+ years of counseling with couples has confirmed this in almost every case. In fact, my experience has also shown me that what Paul is doing here is not simply calling each spouse in the marriage relationship to meet a need the other has, but is calling each spouse to work on, or shore up the primary area where men in general tend to struggle, and women in general tend to struggle.

Because what I've found in nearly every case: Is that one of the hardest things for a **WIFE** to do is respect a husband whom she feels is not expressing love the way she needs him to. And one of the hardest things for a **HUSBAND** to do is continue to actively reach out to his wife in love if he feels she is disrespecting him.

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**Thus, Paul essentially hits men and women in their weak spot.** And if strides are not made to work on these two simple things, it can drive two people apart. Because it will cause emotions to become numbed out / and little irritations to seem unscaleable mountains / which over time can rob us of the desire to even go on in the relationship.

In fact, if people are ignorant of these two principles, and make no strides to understand and remedy them, it can make it SEEM (to each spouse) like the other is actually doing what they do on purpose!

The WIFE interprets his emotional distance as a purposeful attempt to withhold love from her, and the HUSBAND interprets her negativity as a purposeful attempt to withhold respect for him.

In fact, Eggerichs actually explains how this process works for each spouse when he points out that if a wife feels unloved: ***"she typically responds in a negative way. In her opinion he needs to change and become a more sensitive and caring man. Unfortunately, a wife's usual approach is to complain and criticize in order to motivate her husband to become more loving. This usually proves about as successful as trying to sell brass knuckles to Mother Teresa..."***

And, here, ladies, let me add (and I say this as a full-blooded male who has talked with many other men): ***One of the worst ways to try and motivate a man to love you is to demand that he love you.***

When a wife becomes hard, and irritated, and angry, and demands that her husband love her, it usually has just the opposite effect. Because hardness in a woman almost always turns a man off.

The way to win back the love of a husband is by softness, gentleness, and affection, not by harsh demands, disapproval and criticism.

God actually shows us this over and over in Scripture. When God moves to win the hearts or affections of people He does it by showing them grace, mercy and kindness. ***"Do you not know,"*** says Rom. 2:4, ***"that it is the kindness of God that leads you to repentance."*** That is, what wins our hearts to Jesus is not God getting hard, or vindictive, but God showing kindness and grace.

We see this in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and Jesus forgiveness of Mary Magdalene, and Jesus leaving the 99 to go looking for the one lost sheep, and Jesus forgiving the woman caught in adultery -- but especially in Hosea.

For there in the book of Hosea, Israel is likened to a prostitute who marries a faithful husband, yet still goes running after her other lovers.

And what REMEDY does God use to turn her from her sin, soften her heart, and win back her love? Chap. 2:14 tells us: ***"Therefore I am now going to allure her. I will lead her into the desert and speak softly to her. I will give her back her vineyards and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope."***

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What does God do to win back the affections of straying Israel? He doesn't get hard and vindictive and demand her love. He becomes gentle and shows her love and kindness -- especially when she knows she deserves just the opposite.

He becomes kind and tender and leads her away to a quiet place to "allure" her. Literally the word means He, ***"romances"*** her. It's a ***"tender expression used for courtship and winning back love,"*** says Doug Stuart in his Commentary on Hosea, ***"It's kind, considerate favor..."***

And James Luther Mays adds: ***"In the allegory, Yahweh becomes the husband who sets out to win back the love of a woman He has lost [that is, Israel]."*** / He translates the word "allure" as ***"entice"*** and adds that it means: ***"to persuade irresistibly, or overwhelm the resistance and will of another."*** It is even used in Ex. 22:16 of a man who seeks to seduce a virgin.

***"In the wilderness,"*** says Mays, ***"Yahweh will 'make love' to Israel. The expression is literally, 'speak to her heart' and we can feel its proper context in the [language] of courtship... the talk of a man to a woman whose love he seeks."***

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And this principle is true whether you are a man or a woman / a husband or a wife. Love, gentleness & kindness is what changes people's hearts -- not becoming hard.

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Now back to Eggerichs comment regarding the husbands: ***"On the other hand,"*** he says, ***"the wife's dislike [that is, her criticism, complaining and disapproval] is interpreted by the husband as disrespect and even contempt. In his opinion she has changed from the admiring, ever-approving***

**woman she was when they courted. Now she doesn't approve and she's letting him know it. So the husband decides he will motivate his wife to become more respectful by acting in unloving ways.** [Ignoring her, giving her the emotional cold shoulder, harboring anger inside, or refusing to do helpful or loving things for her] **"This usually proves about as successful as trying to sell a truck to an Amish farmer."**

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And that unwise and dysfunctional way of relating (which is so common in marriages) is what he calls "The Crazy Cycle" so many couples get stuck in. **"Without love SHE reacts without respect,"** he says, **"and without respect HE reacts without love."** Because a wife almost always responds to a lack of love with disrespect, and a husband almost always reacts to disrespect by becoming even less loving!

Which means that people often react in a way that actually feeds the problem, instead of lessening the problem. They fail to see that their marriage could be so much better if SHE would only come to understand that it's her respect for him that would motivate him to love her, and if HE would only come to understand that it's his love for her that would motivate her to respect him.

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Then **SECONDLY**, this whole issue is helped enormously when both husband and wife understand that these things are NOT simply SELFISH DESIRES or WANTS that you can withhold from the other or use to get back at your spouse when they don't treat you right. Rather, they are things your spouse NEEDS -- and therefore only by meeting their need (rather than withholding it) can you get what you need!

For instance: Food, for a baby, is an absolute necessity. It's not just a selfish want, it's a need. So, if he or she is hungry, and starts crying, do you respond to your infant by withholding the food and saying, *"Because your crying bothers me, I'm not going to give you any food till tomorrow!"* Or worse yet, *"You cry so much I'm not going to feed you till next week!"*

Is that what you do? NO! Of course, you could justify withholding it if food were simply a want and not a need. For instance, if they were looking at a cell phone and crying because they wanted that you could easily justify not giving them

what they wanted, because it's not a need. Not so with food! Food is a basic physical life-need and thus withholding it for a week (or even a day or two) would be cruel.

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Yet, you know what? When it comes to our spouses, that's often the very thing we do. Contrary to common sense, we seek to get them to do something for us, or stop doing something that bothers us, by withholding a basic need.

And it often creates what I call, "The Waiting Game." A game played out in many Christian marriages which goes like this: The wife says to her husband: *"I'll give you the respect you need only if or when you love me!"* And the husband responds by saying: *"And I'll give you the love you need only if or when you respect me."* The lines are drawn, pride enters in, and the standoff begins!

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Yet when that happens, you know what's gone wrong? It's really a spiritual problem. A problem of acting counter to the Gospel. It's caused by embracing a law-based, self-righteous, or legalistic paradigm for marriage, which makes everything based on merit and totally contradicts the Gospel they claim to believe!

Why? Because they've made their willingness to meet the need of their spouse a matter of the other earning their favor, or meriting their love, or being worthy of their respect.

They hold the need of their spouse hostage and wait for the other to change before they give them what they need -- which in the case of stubborn people, or deeply wounded people, can lead to extremely lengthy stalemates that last years and even decades. "Stalemates" where the couple cohabitates in the same house, with no love being shown and no respect being offered.

That's why Paul (in his wisdom) lays down no conditions, nor exception clauses, for either the husband or the wife. Nowhere in the NT does Paul ever say to the husband, "You can withhold your love until she respects you" or to the wife, "You can withhold your respect until he loves you."

After all, would you make your infant EARN the right to eat? Does God make us earn His favor? Does He make us achieve some standard of human righteousness before he makes the sun shine on our crops, or the rain water our fields?

Does He withhold His parental care of us as His children until we merit it?

No! We already saw that. He changes our hearts and melts our resistance to Himself by being kind and gracious. He doesn't wait for us to change or withhold His love from us until we do. He gives us His love knowing that that's precisely what we need to receive if there is any chance for true change to take place.

And what does one do if he or she doesn't change? That's not your responsibility. As with most all commands in the Bible, I'm not responsible for how the other person responds to me. I'm only responsible for how I respond to that person. God only holds me responsible for what he commands me to do.

Then **LAST**, I want to end by sharing some practical ways that a husband can love his wife and a wife can respect her husband. Because there are certain things that love will make a person do, and prevent a person from doing. And there are certain things respect will make a person do and stop a person from doing. And following Paul's lead, let's start with the husband and what he needs to do or stop doing to "love His wife as he loves himself."

**1st)** Husbands must remember that the love they are asked to give is agape, and agape is not feeling-dependent love. If it were, then husbands could play "the waiting game" -- they could wait until the feelings came to motivate them to love their wives. That is, they could wait till they felt like loving her.

But that's not the case! Agape doesn't work that way! Remember what I told you? Agape is noble love. Agape does what is right because it's the right thing to do. In fact, as Paul says in Rom. 13:10, "**Agape seeks to do no harm to its neighbor.**" Or conversely, agape is the determination to always do good to your spouse and give her what she needs -- even when you don't FEEL like it!

You see, too many husbands withhold "love" from their wives, under the bogus cover that they are seeking to be honest and not hypocrites, thinking that to act

loving when you don't feel loving is hypocritical! ***But Paul takes us beyond all that ridiculous nonsense!*** For when he tells us to "love her" he means feed her, and care for her, and provide for her needs -- "like you do for your own body" (vv. 28-29).

He means "loving her as you love yourself" (v. 33). Which means considering all her needs and determining to do what you can to meet those needs in her, just as you seek to have them met in you -- be they physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual and relational.

It means telling her you love her, even when you struggle to feel anything (and every husband goes through those times). In fact, according to this passage, we are to love our wives as an act of our obedience to Christ! You don't let feelings dictate your acts of love, you do them because Christ, your Lord, asks you to! You love her for Christ's sake and for His glory, whether you feel like it or not!

(Imagine standing before God on the day of judgment and having Him ask you: "Why didn't you show love to your wife?" What do you think He would think of this answer: "Because I didn't feel like it.")

It means treating your wife with honor and dignity and the respect you would want her to show you. For as Peter says in 1 Pet. 3:7, she needs that too. And he adds ***"be considerate."***

It means listening to her even when you're tired, and sacrificing to do what she wants even when you'd rather be doing something else. It means being sensitive to her needs, and asking her what you can do to help.

It means helping around the house, and taking her on dates, and spending special time together with just her, and occasionally surprising her by splurging on her.

It means (as the servant leader or head of your home) being pro-active in your love for her. That is, not waiting until your wife comes asking for the love she needs, but seeing and seeking to meet the need before she has to ask. That's part of being a leader!

As a husband God calls us to be considering the needs of our wives ahead of time (especially since husbands (other than in rare cases) tend to be notoriously lazy lovers -- except when they want sex!

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And for you wives: Respecting your husbands means honoring and valuing him as a person, even when what you wish he would do is so much more than what he actually does. Because what I said about "agape" can be said of "respect" as well: It is not feeling-dependent. That is, you don't have to feel anything to honor or treat a person with dignity and respect.

Respect is not a feeling, it's an attitude. An attitude fueled by a determination of the will to treat a person in a certain way -- even when you don't feel like it. When Peter said "honor the king, and show respect to everyone," he didn't mean, "If you feel like it."

In fact, he knew that many Christians would not "feel" like honoring Caesar. He had persecuted them / was well known for being immoral, would soon have Peter and Paul and many others killed, and spent taxes on things that God hated -- like the violent games at the coliseum.

Yet Peter tells them to do it anyway. ***And they could, because it had nothing to do with how they felt. That's what too many Christians forget. Showing a person respect is a choice of the will that we must often make totally contrary to what we FEEL like doing.***

It's like basketball or football players after losing a championship game. Do they feel like walking over to their victorious opponents and shaking each other's hand? No. But they do it -- out of respect, dignity and good sportsmanship.

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LISTEN: In some ways respect is earned, but in other ways (especially in a Christian context) it's given, like salvation, as a gift. What does it look like? Respecting your husband means never putting him down, or talking poorly of him in public, or in front of the kids.

It means encouraging him to be the man and take the lead. It means supporting him in his work, and even doing all you can behind the scenes to help him succeed.

It means praying for him, and showing appreciation for what he does do, and being gracious when he makes a bad decision. And when you do disagree with him (and those times will come) tell him -- but do it in private and not in front of the kids.

And I know this can be taken wrongly, but men need their wives to be their "cheerleader" (so to speak) to encourage them to press on to greater things, and take risks, and try new ventures.

And they need you to tell them they have your support and trust. For it is true, that behind every great man is a great woman -- supporting and urging him on to greatness.

**Love** and **Respect**. Remember those two simple words, and put them into practice, and watch your marriage improve, fights nearly disappear, and your home become characterized by relational harmony (at least between you and your spouse)!