

## MARRIAGE AND SELF-WORTH

Ephesians 5:33, 1 Peter 3:7

By Raymond White

The Bible says *husbands, love your wives (Ephesians 5:25)* and *wives, love your husbands (Titus 2:4)*. That's well and good, but how? Certainly love is how you feel about someone, but if that's all there is to it, then it's not much. To be real, love must be loving deeds.

There are many ways to express love, and our duty to each other, as husbands and wives, is to express love in every way possible, to provide for each other's needs, *all* needs: physical, emotional, spiritual, and any other kind of need we can imagine.

One important way to express love is affirmation. We all have a nagging need for a sense of self-worth, to know, or at least feel, that we are loved because we somehow have merited it. Maybe that has to do with inborn insecurity, that if we are not in some way worthy of love, and all the other good things that come our way, it might all disappear. And so we continually seek approval for everything we do and define ourselves by that approval.

That's good because it keeps us civil. That we aren't constantly killing each other does make life better, so our on-going need for approval spirals the human race to better things.

On the other hand, if we *don't* have affirmation and a good sense of self-worth, we feel bad, and feeling bad is not good, especially if we feel *so* bad that we engage in self-destructive behaviors, like for instance, suicide.

So, among the good things husbands and wives should give each other, and to others we love and care about, is a good sense of self-worth. How do we do that?

### [1] PRAISE

To jumpstart someone's self-esteem there is nothing quite like praise. As children, we get praise from our parents, then later from friends and teachers, then suitors, then when we marry, we turn to our spouse for praise and affirmation. And if our spouse responds effectively to that need, then we live happily ever after, or close to.

It's about *value*. More than just feeling loved, we also want to feel valued. And to convey that sense of value, we praise.

*Proverbs 31:28 Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, he praiseth her.*

Imagine the things this woman might be blessed with. She may be charming, beautiful, kind, ambitious, diligent, etc. But she may not know that she possesses any of these virtues unless others notice them in her and say so. But it's not just her knowing she possesses such virtues (she might figure that out on her own), it's knowing that others know and care enough to say so. It's not just being pretty, but being pretty enough to draw a compliment. Her husband might say, "Honey, in case I haven't said so in awhile, you are stunningly beautiful." A little flattery can make a woman's day, or her week, or her year. Men, if you make your wife feel good about herself, she will never leave, she will never stray, and she will be happy.

It goes the other way too. From a seldom read book of the Bible we find this —

**Song of Solomon 5:10** *My beloved is...the chiefest among ten thousand. :11 His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. :12 His eyes are as the eyes of doves... :13 His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet as flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh. :14 His hands are as gold rings... :15 His legs are as pillars of marble... :16 His mouth is most sweet, yes, and is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.*

Now that is one powerful dude. He is her alpha male and she makes sure he knows it. Women, if you make your husband feel good about himself, he will never leave, he will never stray, and he will be happy.

Why did she say “and this is my friend”? Because he does friendly things for her. *He* gets up with the baby. *He* changes the diapers. *He* washes the dishes. And when he gets home from work, he doesn’t vanish into the TV room, he engages her in conversation and wants to know how *her* day has been. He never takes her for granted and he makes her feel good about herself. That’s a friend.

Words matter.

**Proverbs 7:21** *With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him.*

We can hope that this woman was his wife, but we suspect that she was not. Either way, seduction has as much to do with making our partner feel good about him or herself than about luring him or her with our physical appeal — although that matters too. If your partner is not getting affirmation from you, he or she may be vulnerable to kind words from someone else.

## [2] VIVE LA DIFFÉRENCE

The challenge, though, is that male and female self images are slightly different. The two genders each have their own desires, so husbands and wives each need to adjust their thinking a bit to accommodate the other. The Bible acknowledges that difference with two words —

**1 Peter 3:7** *...ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel...*

**Ephesians 5:33** *...let...the wife see that she reverence her husband.*

In the first, Peter speaks to men about women. And in the second, Paul speaks to women about men. And the two verbs, honor and reverence, suggest that men and women have different perspectives. Men and women both need their egos stroked, but their egos are wired differently and therefore need to be stroked differently.

Assuming that a husband and wife are both well intended, that they really are trying to please each other, the goal then is to get it right. We need to offer not what we *think* our partners need but what they *actually* need. To do that, we must step out of our own gender perspective and try to think like the opposite gender, just as Peter further asserts, “according to knowledge,” which means, guys (and gals), you’d better figure it out.

To trivialize the situation, suppose that each wants to surprise the other with a night out. He might say, "Surprise! I have tickets to a boxing match. You'll love it." Well, she might not. Or she might say, "Surprise! I have tickets to the ballet. You'll love it." Well, he might not, though a loving husband might pretend to. If he falls asleep, ladies, at least be grateful he's there.

The point is clear: When you give something, you should try to give what that person wants, not what you would want. That's where men and women get stuck when they try to stroke each other's egos. Men and women need to try a bit harder to get into the other's head so that the ego stoking actually works.

One key difference between men and women is that men tend to define themselves by what they *do*, while women more commonly define themselves by what they *are*. So he must feel good about his work and she must feel good about herself just for being her.

Beyond wives and husbands loving each other, which is a very broad concept, Peter tells men to love their wives by honoring them, and Paul tells women to love their husbands by reverencing them, and the difference is not trivial.

What do women want anyway? For that matter, what do men want? Clearly, something different. If each could figure out the other, the world would surely be a better place. So, why is it so hard for a husband and wife to get into each other's heads and see life as the other sees it? Because their brains are wired differently, and therefore they think differently.

To illustrate: One study asked women what they want in a man, and the ladies produced lists of a hundred or more items. One lady listed *three hundred*, which certainly seems an overkill, or maybe not if that's really what she wanted. Women really spend time thinking about this. But when men were asked the same question, what do they want in a woman, they produced lists of two maybe three items. Are men more easily pleased, or are their minds on football?

Another study observed pre-school children and found that 100% of girl talk was verbal. Why would that be surprising? Because only 60% of boy talk was verbal, the other 40% was expletives like "Crash," "Bang," and "Roar!" At their early age, social influences had nothing to do with their different behaviors; their different thinking patterns really are inborn.

Female thinking patterns are said to be holistic and male thinking patterns linear. Women complain that men have a one-tracked-mind, and men complain that women don't focus.

To illustrate, decades ago my wife Cyndi and I would get together each Friday night with another couple Jim and Joanne for an evening of a game of Risk. The game was fun, but the real fun was watching ourselves play. Jim and I got very intense, talking strategy and tactics, while Cyndi and Joanne spent most of the time yakking about other couples, family, church, flowers — frankly, Jim and I never knew what they were talking about, but it sure wasn't the game. And throughout the evening Jim and I would say to the ladies things like, "It's your turn," "Are you going to roll the dice anytime tonight?" "Can't you keep your mind on the game, even for a minute?" The answer was, no, they couldn't. They had better things to think and talk about than a silly board game. And it got really annoying when one of them won. Good grief!

We learned from that experience that men and women approach games, life, love, and everything differently.

That is not absolute, of course. In chess for instance, there are many women who hold the unrestricted grandmaster title. So certainly, *those* women are *very* focused. But still, there are typical male patterns of thinking and typical female patterns of thinking, and if it were not so, the whole human race would be the less for it. Strategically speaking, female holistic thinking plus male linear thinking cover the ground of the whole human experience a lot better than either

alone. If men and women thought the same, we'd still be living in caves, or be extinct eaten by dinosaurs. As it is, humans rule the world, and that's a good thing. God called it dominion.

Why are men and women so different? There is a theory that it has to do with the Y chromosome, testosterone, and the sizes of the two hemispheres of the human brain. Whether the theory is sound or not, I can't say. But for whatever the reason, men and women are motivated differently, and that difference is so conspicuous that to deny it is laughable.

Why is this important, and specifically in marriage? Because we need to let it be, and to see the differences as positive rather than negative. Men and women are sometimes annoyed by gender differences; and even worse, understand those differences to mean that their gender is superior; and even worse, make demands that the other can't possibly accommodate.

In the movie "My Fair Lady" Professor Henry Higgins sings the song, "Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Man". In that song, Henry lists all the male virtues that he thinks females lack. The song would be hatefully offensive if it were not so sarcastically funny and absurd. To think that either gender is superior because they are different *is* absurd, and it's mean. That's a problem. Too many people actually believe their gender to be superior, or at least they act as if they do (like that smug eye roll), and that leads to great unhappiness and divorce.

There should be an opposite song about male foibles, but I can't think of one offhand. There is male bashing which, to a point, is humorous, but beyond that point becomes irritating and offensive, and can be as mean as female bashing. Either is hurtful and destructive. Speaking for myself, I hate blonde jokes (my gorgeous wife is blonde) and on one occasion when I was asked to tell a blonde joke, I refused and explained that I have no desire to insult my wife.

How, then, should we deal with the innate differences between men and women? The answer is that we should embrace the differences, enjoy them, and be grateful that we don't have to fall in love with a mirror image of ourselves. This do-sa-do between men and women is the joy and the wonder of life. And that is better than using our differences as a call to battle every time our partners do something we're pretty sure we wouldn't do.

The Bible acknowledges the difference with the words *honour* and *reverence* — honor her, revere him. That makes sense.

I once heard an author (whose name I've long forgotten) use different words. He said women want to be *cherished* and men want to be *respected*. Later, I read a survey that said it even differently. It concluded that women want to be *desired* and men want to be *appreciated*.

Men and women both need affirmation of their personal worth and dignity, but each in a different way. Women need their husbands to honor, cherish, and desire them; and men need their wives to revere, respect, and appreciate them. If either is unwilling to do that, there will likely be problems, and maybe problems that will kill the marriage.

### [3] LAST THOUGHTS

*Proverbs 18:22* Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.

Men, that's the right way to see your wife. She is a very good thing indeed. Treat her that way, cherish her as a blessing from God, and you'll have a happy marriage.

*Proverbs 21:14* A gift in secret pacifieth anger...

Had a fight recently? Want to make up? Try a gift. But a gift that she'd want, or that he'd want, not something that you'd want. That's the trick, isn't it? — getting into the head of someone of the other gender. But that's what makes life fun — figuring out what someone you care about would like and give them *that*.

When I was newly married, I really didn't like shopping with my wife. It was agonizing to tag along as she shopped and picked over *everything* it seemed. But then I heard the truth of it on the radio. An author (another whose name I've forgotten) said, "Women shop, men hunt." That revelation opened my eyes about her and I resolved to enjoy the tag-along experience. Now when we go shopping, I enjoy watching my wife in her natural habitat: the shopping mall.

Here's a trick I used for decades: I'm lousy at gift shopping — for Christmas or birthdays or any other holiday. So whenever we are out browsing, if she examined something she liked but didn't buy it, later I'd sneak back and buy that and give it to her at the next holiday. At least I'd know she'll like it. And not only would she like the gift, but also that I went to the trouble.

One time she and I were with her aged parents wandering around a mall. My mother-in-law bought a brightly colored blouse. My father-in-law grumbled to me, "I don't know why she buys that stuff. She has drawers full of that kind of thing and she never wears any of it. She can barely even see." I replied, "It's because she can't see that she buys that stuff. Buying that stuff is the only fun she has left." He said, "Yeah, you're right. I'll stop grumbling."

A year later she passed away. And he missed her terribly until the day he died. I don't know if heaven has malls, but if it does, I'm sure he is following her around to all of them and enjoying every minute of it.

Don't grumble about differences, enjoy them. Men, cherish your wives. Women, respect your husbands. Is the male ego ludicrous? Well, I have one, and I can tell you from experience that it is often ludicrous. But so what?

Women, enjoy your man's particular quirks. Men, enjoy your woman's particular quirks. Someday you will miss them. Instead of attacking each other, protect each other from the failures and humiliations of life, and marriage will be the blessed experience that God meant it to be.