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**Must A Woman Fear Her husband?**

Wayne Jackson

In the American Standard Version of the New Testament, there is a statement in Paul's writings that troubles many. "Nevertheless do ye also severally love each one his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see that she fear her husband" (Ephesians 5:33). Is a woman actually to "fear" her husband?

There is no Bible translation that is flawless, and this is an example of a poor rendition in the ASV. Even the older King James Version has a more appropriate term. The wife is to "revere" her husband, or, as it is in the footnote, "respect" him (cf. NKJB; NASB; ESV).

**Fear**

The Greek term is *phobeo*, found 93 times in the New Testament. The word can signify apprehension, "to be afraid of" (Matthew 9:8; 17:6; 27:54). On the other hand, it can suggest "to have a profound measure of respect for," or to "revere" (cf. Luke 1:50; 18:2,4; Ephesians 5:33) (see: Frederick Danker, *et al.*, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000, pp. 1060-1062). The following conclusions may be drawn from the relevant biblical material regarding this theme.

1. *Phobeo*, in its domestic sense, does not denote a slavish fear, a dreaded intimidation with reference to a wife's demeanor toward her husband. Rather, the apostle speaks of the healthy respect that a woman has for her husband because of the reverence she has for the Lord.

That this term does not demand a debasing "fear" is illustrated from a text in Plato, in which he speaks of *phobeisthai to soma*, i.e., a "respect for his body" – by doing what is in the best interest of the body (see: R.C.H. Lenski, *Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, p. 644). The ancient philosopher certainly was not suggesting that he was afraid of his own body.

The noble rationale for the wife's respect is provided in a previous passage where Paul admonishes Christians to practice "submitting" themselves to one another "in the fear of Christ," i.e., stimulated by their reverence for the Lord (Ephesians 5:21). We revere our Savior, and submit to his will, and yet our hearts overflow with love for him. Reverence and love are not mutually exclusive attributes.

Genuine reverence is not generated by intimidation or bullying tactics; rather, it is achieved by the sacrificial outpouring of love (cf. v. 25) which, in turn, elicits the respect of the one receiving the devotion. It is not a relationship that is to be ridiculed or disdained, but one that is healthy and mutually rewarding. And when men begin loving their wives "as their own bodies" (vv. 28-29), more respect will issue from the hearts of their wives.

2. This required and exalted attitude embodies a genuine respect that expresses itself in “subjection” (a word despised in modern society by radical “feminism”). We subject ourselves to Christ, just as Jesus subjected himself to the Father (Philippians 2:5ff), and will again at the time of his return (1 Corinthians 15:28). We subject ourselves to one another in mutual service (v. 21), and there is much honor in this.
3. The respect that the wife has for her husband manifests itself in several practical ways. She does not criticize him to others; she honors him. She does not speak disrespectfully to him (nor he to her). She does not neglect him in the realm of those responsibilities that are unique to wifehood, and she does not go behind his back and do things that she knows he would disapprove.

### **A Broader Scope**

While we are discussing “respect,” it should not be out of bounds to address the general respect that Christian women are required to have for their male counterparts “in Christ.”

The New Testament teaches there is a graduated spiritual scale of authority that prevails in the kingdom of Christ. God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman (1 Corinthians 11:3). This context does not deal with a husband/wife relationship (as suggested by the English Standard Version), but a man/woman relationship “in the Lord.” The Christian woman, who overtly acts disrespectfully toward a Christian man, dishonors both Christ and God.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul forbade a woman to lead men in a worship service or, in any other way, to exercise “authority” over the man in this spiritual context (1 Timothy 2:8ff). Such being the case, it assuredly is never proper for a woman to go far beyond those limitations by caustically rebuking a Christian brother.

She may disagree with him; she may speak of her concerns to him; she may even respectfully inform him that she disagrees. But to render a harsh rebuke is a transgression of the principle set forth in New Testament scripture. To do so publicly compounds the error.

Do you suppose that if a woman **may not** stand before a church assembly of men, and function as their teacher in the humblest manner of which she is capable, that it is pleasing to the Lord when she unleashes all the fury of her soul in a stream of blistering words to a Christian man – even if he is worthy of rebuke by appropriate parties?

Women who fire off “hot” letters to their elders, rebuking them for some action with which they have disagreed, are in violation of biblical truth. Ladies who “blast” a gospel preacher, because of an irritation at some sermon that has upset them, are as out of place as the raspy-throat Pentecostal woman-preacher who barks orders from her digressive pulpit.

Christian women (and men for that matter) should always conduct themselves at the highest level of spiritual decorum – in this case, acknowledging and respecting the “role” distinctions imposed by God.

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## WHY AM I A CHRISTIAN? (Part Two)

Matthew Martin

Most likely, if you ask ten Gospel preachers this question they will present ten different, but all very true, answers. It is true, that there are dozens of good and sound answers to such a question, but I don't have the time or space in this article to cover every reason, so I will only give three. Two weeks ago the first of these three reasons was given: I am a Christian because I want to be. Consider another simple reason as to why I am a Christian: because I need to be.

### I AM A CHRISTIAN BECAUSE I *NEED* TO BE

Yes I want to be a Christian. But what if I didn't? What if I simply said, "Thanks, but no thanks?" To some, that is foolish, and rightly so. After all, who would consciously turn down the free gift of salvation (Rom. 5:18)? Yet, everyday people are living lives that scream "I don't want to be a Christian!" It is a sad fact, but still a fact, that some people just don't want it. Unfortunately for them, whether you want it or not, you need it. You *have* to be a Christian.

The Devil is smart. He has managed to put people in positions of power who to some say, "religion is evil," and to others, "all religions are good religions." Think about the politicians and activists who say that "religion is everywhere and needs to be contained" or that falsely say, "the constitution declares separation of church and state, therefore there must be no mention of God in public schools, places of business, or any government offices. And yet, these same politicians and activists will say "the Muslim people are being suppressed, they should have every opportunity to practice their religion as the 'Judeo-Christian.'" What hypocrisy!

The truth is, there is no salvation in the Muslim religion or any other religion besides Christianity (Acts 4:12). And despite what some try to say, Christianity is not a danger to society, or the cause of societal problems or something that should be avoided, it is the *solution* to society's problems. And it is something that one cannot *afford* to avoid.

Why am I a Christian? Because I want to be one, and more importantly, I need to be one. And if I am not, then I am asking for the full blunt of God's flaming, fiery, judgment (2 Thess. 1:8).

I am a Christian because I *want* to be. I am a Christian because I *need* to be. Next week, number three: I am a Christian because I *love* being a Christian.

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