

Leadership & Submission

– Sunday School Notes –

For the last couple of weeks we have looked at anger, a problem that affects both men and women. We have looked at anger a bit more from the female perspective because in this case – in addition to being a character trait that easily leads to sin – anger also challenges the leadership role of the husband.

11 The Escapist

Today we want to look at a problem that also affects both men and women, but becomes more difficult if husbands are affected. We're talking about a person, who doesn't want to grow up and, to a certain extent, still behaves like a child. He or she still lives in a world of fantasy that is dominated by feelings and a desire for romance and pleasure. He acts spontaneously without considering the consequences, and tries to avoid accountability and responsibility.

Life is so easy if you don't have any responsibilities. You can do what you want and somebody else is going to take care of the consequences. As a child, you have a certain right to this behavior. You wouldn't be able to develop creativity if you had to think through all the results of your actions. Besides, you lack the experience. That's you we have parents who train you and protect you if you really mess up. So you can enjoy the world and play.

But you're also supposed to grow up, to learn from your experience and to live responsibly. That doesn't mean you're not allowed to have fun anymore, but you have to accept limitations. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 13:11**

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

As an adult you can't just go on living as if life were just a grand game. There is nobody who will always clean up after you or pay for everything that you desire. You can't play with toys all day long, and what you say to other people will not be as easily forgotten – particularly if it is something nasty. You now have a responsibility for your own life and the life of the people around you.

But some people never make the transition from being a child to adulthood. The attractions of life are so fascinating for them that they fail to see that having fun is not all of reality. The only thing that grows is their desire for things or experiences they want to have. They are controlled almost entirely by instantaneous feelings and not so much by a rational understanding of the facts of life, which they consider so terribly boring. They try to escape from a life that puts so many duties and responsibilities on them and hope that in some magical way they can still be the child that everybody loves.

To a certain extent, this is a characteristic of all men. Deep inside we are only big boys. We are still fascinated by toys – it is just that the toys have grown with us and are much more expensive now. We still need heroes to adore and identify with – that’s why we get so excited about sports. We need to fight for a big cause but have difficulties to take care of the tiny little details of life, particularly of those that do not immediately affect us. We like to be leaders, but we don’t like the responsibilities that come with that role. We don’t really want to grow up – and some of us never do.

The quest for fantasy and pleasure is part of what makes dating such men so fascinating and such a romantic experience. Living with them will always carry an element of excitement. However, many women who are married to a man-child soon notice that the romance becomes self-directed and that the fun has a bittersweet sting of reality at the end. The excitement comes at a very high price and a disaster awaits those who realize that too late.

Of course, there are also women who never really grow up and living with them brings the same mixture of excitement and trouble with the facts of reality. But the difference is that wives aren’t supposed to be leaders of the family and can thus gently be directed towards more responsibility by a firm but understanding husband. But how do you turn a man who tries to escape from the responsibilities of leadership into an active husband without taking over his role as leader of the family?

11.1 A Character Study

If we want to turn men who try to escape from their responsibilities into active leaders of the family, we first have to understand their character. What are the symptoms of escapism and why do some men have difficulties with growing up? **ACTIVE PHASE!!**

1. Probably the most dominating symptom of an immature person is a *chronic irresponsibility*. He can spend hours with hobbies, sports, and other things that fascinate him or give him pleasure and totally forget the things he is supposed to do. He tends to *put off things* until the last minute, hoping that somebody else might rescue him.

He has *plenty of excuses* if he didn’t fulfill his duties. “*I could not*” is what he says, and he tries to *blame the circumstances* or somebody else for his unwillingness to take care of his chores. “*This is not my fault*” is what you get to hear.

The *fear of being responsible for a failure* and having to accept criticism is probably one of the driving forces behind this behavior. Better to do nothing than attempting something that doesn’t make fun in the first place and may go wrong. The lazy servant in the parable of the talents in **Matthew 25:14–30** is a good example for this type of mentality.

2. A *lack of self discipline* is also a very prominent feature of a person who doesn’t want to grow up. Self-discipline means putting on restrictions and that seems to

be quite the opposite of having fun. Typical symptoms are *overeating* – often coupled with fruitless attempts to go on a diet; *overspending*, that is giving in the desire to buy things immediately if they appear appealing or being overly generous – a habit that is worsened by the use of credit cards; *making promises* that are not being kept later; putting off things and *never having time* for the important but not pressing thing in life; a *chronic impatience* with others who seem to steal his time.

Sticking to a decision or a promise, keeping records and balancing a checkbook, or a proper time management is just not what such a person likes to do because these things are so terribly rational and boring. As a result, the person dominated by feelings often fights weight problems, is almost always in dept, and hardly finds time for the daily devotions. Often he expects those who love him to rescue him from the mess he got in instead of doing something about it himself. After all, “*if they love me they have the duty to care for me*” is what he feels.

In all this an immature person tries to *avoid the pain or discomfort* that comes with having to saying no to oneself. So he or she simple doesnt do so and puts the responsibility into the hands of others.

3. Often coupled with that is an *abracadabra mentality*. Somehow, the escapist believes, somebody or something will come to his rescue. Living in a world of fantasy, he dreams of winning the lottery as solution for his overspending or finding the magical drug against overweight without having to eat less. He believes that *love means unconditional support*, which means that his family should solve his problems. If they don't (or can't) he believes they don't love him.

Waving this magical wand of love may have worked during his childhood, where his parents might have expressed their love by taking every burden away from him. And although it doesn't work anymore in the world of adults, he tries it anyway – because he fails to see that he has to assume his responsibilities himself now.

4. *Halfheartedness* is another characteristic of an immature person. He begins many tasks, but hardly ever finishes any of them if they make less fun than is comfortable for him. In his wishful thinking he dreams of achieving glorious results, but when it turns out to be less easy than he thought, he rather drops it ahead of time than trying to the end and possibly fail nevertheless. So he can always say “I could do it, if I wanted to”.

Behind all this there is a *fear of failure* and an *inability to accept himself* as he is. Instead he needs to keep up the self-image of a person with a great potential and this would be shattered by admitting a failure.

5. Finally, the escapist is *very romantic*. That is what makes him so attractive in the first place. He feels that he loves other people deeply – but his understanding of love is still childish, as he confuses love with what he feels for others. He may express this with actions that are very effectful, but he hardly tries to prove his love by what he does in everyday life. The tiny little practical things of the adult life don't mean much to him.

But true love is expressed in caring for the needs of others – and viewing this as privilege, not as tedious chore. **1. John 3:18** says

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

The escapist's conception of love is a very selfish one – the only thing that counts is that *he* has good feelings about the person he loves. But these feelings depend on the love he receives, not on the love that is in him. Real love is

patient, it is kind . . . it is not easily angered, it always protects, it always trusts, it always hopes, and endures all things **1. Corinthians 13:4–7**

Most of all, feelings may change, but love never fails. So *feeling love* has little to do with what real love is all about. The step from this child-like love to adult love is what makes us mature – but the escapist has never taken this step.

Again, it should be noted that these symptoms can be found in women as well as in men. Living together with an escapist will always be interesting, but having an escapist as wife or husband leads to a very unequal relationship. You don't really have a partner who complements you and helps you overcome your weaknesses. It is more like having a child that acts a bit like an adult, but – apart from his or her wishes and demands – has not really grown up yet.

11.2 Helping him without becoming his mother

The situation is particularly bad, if the escapist is husband, because in this case the family has no true leader. And it takes a lot of patience, love, and wisdom, to deal with this situation properly. There are many wrong responses that women use in dealing with such a passive husband. Criticism, manipulation, or simply taking over the family is *not* what will turn your husband into an active leader of the family.

But he will probably not be able to change all by himself and the question is how you can help him in doing so without becoming his mother. In the rest of this lesson we will discuss a strategy for dealing with an escapist husband. What is it that you can do to help him and what should you avoid?

ACTIVE PHASE!!

- One very important recommendation that counselors give to people who have to deal with an escapist partner is *not to deny* or ignore the problem. This is

particularly important for Christian women, who sometimes tend to believe that submission and love is the same as putting up with everything their husbands do. They find excuses for his behavior, ignore his selfishness, rescue him from every situation that he managed to get himself into, and in all this dismiss the feeling that something is wrong.

Denial is an attribute of an overprotective mother. It allows a man to continue to act like a child and does not at all help him to grow up. Why should he, if you constantly clean up the mess he created and always protect him from self-inflicted harm? If you truly love your husband, you must help him to grow up instead of preserving his current state of immaturity.

- *Complaining* doesn't help either. Compulsive complaints and random punishment are typical reactions of overprotective mothers and something a child-man is probably accustomed to. Complaints will not change your husband's behavior – all you will get are reflexes that he has rehearsed since childhood. He will either ignore your complaints completely or start becoming defensive if he feels his masculinity threatened. After all, he doesn't want you to be the *judge* of his actions.

It becomes even worse if he goes along with your judgment. In this case you receive the role of a puppeteer who tells him what he needs to do, how he has to feel, and what he is really thinking. You treat him like a kindergarten child and that is what he will be to you – a child, but not a partner who can nurture and guide you.

So – never ever judge your husband or tell him how he should think or feel. There are only two possible reactions to that – opposition or giving in. And in both cases the long-term result is not what you wanted to achieve.

- One thing that you should keep in mind is that men – in contrast to women – do not like to change. Stability is one of the dominating factors of our life. We want something that we can rely on, that turned out to be trustworthy and good. As a result, we gravitate to routine in many things we do or prefer.

Of course, there are exceptions, but we do not like changes in the way we dress, what we eat, the arrangement of our home and in the routine of things we use to do. In the eyes of our wives it looks like if we don't care – but why should we change something that has proven to be reliable? Women have a difficult time understanding that for a man change is often a threat to his feeling of security and not at all welcome.

So what makes a man change?

ACTIVE PHASE!!

We only change when there is an urgent need for it, a situation that affects *us* so strongly that it is easier to change than to leave it the way it is. One husband

put it this way “I change when the pain of change is less than the pain of the situation.” If we’re comfortable enough with the current situation, why should we change?

- To a certain extent, this is the key to the solution. A man-child is often too comfortable in his situation, if his wife protects him from the consequences of his irresponsibility. And if she criticizes him, the only changes you will see are directed at dealing with the pain of criticism, and not with his irresponsible behavior. So what can you do instead?

Proverbs 22:6, 23:13 recommend to **Train up a child in the way he should go and to withhold not correction from the child.** To a person who hasn’t grown up yet, you have to apply the same principles. He needs to be trained to deal with reality. You have to let him face the natural consequences of his actions.

Don’t cover for him, but also don’t lecture him. He needs to find out himself after you pointed out a problem once. If he falls – let him experience the pain before you step in and help him. And even then, don’t rescue him all by yourself. Let him figure out a solution and support him – but he is the one who needs to take action.

As an example I would like to read a passage from the book (*pages 100–101*) that illustrates these principles in a very practical way.

If you want to help your husband grow, you need to be firm and learn to control your own emotions instead of giving in to frustration over your husband’s behavior. Since you’re dealing with an adult and not with a dependent child, it takes a lot more courage and endurance to do so, as you may *have to face a few unpleasant consequences together.*

You may feel the urge to avoid some painful situations by doing things for which he is responsible. But consider the true costs. If you step in, you take the responsibility away from him and he will never learn. But if you endure, there is a great chance that you will move towards a mature relationship and eventually see a change in your husband that you couldn’t achieve by any other means.