

Leadership & Submission

– Sunday School Notes –

Review from previous week

Topic: Who controls how things are done in the family

Main insight: Both are equally responsible, but we have a tendency to be more controlling than we freely admit. We talked about patterns in male behavior that make a woman feel that he doesn't view her as equal and female behavior that make a man feel that his wife doesn't respect him.

Who remembers?

1. He needs to control everything in the household (car, money, technical devices,...)
2. Ideas must come from him or he won't even think them through
3. He is always strong, doesn't show weaknesses
4. He wants to *solve* all problems instead of simply listening to his wife sharing her feelings.

and on the female side there is only one problem, but equally strong

1. She criticizes everything he does wrong

Even if she is right with her criticism – and she is in most cases – it is not a good idea to constantly criticize her husband, because it definitely discourages him. Now, I haven't answered to a typical argument that usually comes up at this point – and I am glad it did: “*Well, I wouldn't have to criticize him if he would just do what I tell him*”. From a one-sided perspective this is a valid argument, but let me tell you – *it does not work this way*. Hundreds of millions of wives have tried this approach using the same argument and continued to criticize what their husbands were doing wrong. But the result was never a change – only withdrawal or growing opposition and fights. Changing your husband by criticizing him *always fails* and you would not be the first one to succeed.

If you want to see any changes in your husband there are other things you must try. We will talk about this in greater detail in a few weeks, but essentially it is the following: encourage him in a godly manner, support him as a leader and he doesn't have to use all his energy to defend himself against your criticism – but can use it to discover what you need and do things for you out of love – not because of pressure.

Now what was the point of discussing these things? Obviously you women can very much understand what your husbands are doing wrong and you men – yes I noticed your silent sigh last sunday – finally got some support by somebody else saying that “constant criticism” is no good.

But should you now go to you mate and remind him or her that he or she is “breaking the rules” of a good marriage? No, the purpose is that men and women should learn

to detect the patterns in their own behavior, that do damage to their marriage. Let us briefly look at **Luke 6:41–42**.

KJV: And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.

Got the point? Let us first improve our *own* behavior. And only when we're done with that and have nothing left to improve – then we can tell our partners what they still do wrong.

But if you ever get there, your partner will probably have reached the same level of perfection much earlier but was loving enough to let you improve at your own pace.

3 Differences in God's design for man and woman

Now let us come to the first step in building a healthier relationship between you and your mate, that is understanding the principal differences between men and women and accepting them as God's design for a fulfilled marriage, not as threat to your own identity.

I think nobody really wants to deny that men and women are entirely different creations. We talked about the different design of men and women two weeks ago: the man is supposed to be the provider (Genesis 2:15), leader, and manager of resources (Genesis 1:26) while the woman is made to receive, respond, and to nurture life – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. These differences do not only show in the ways our bodies are made, but even stronger in the way we think – that is in everything we do and how we approach the world.

It has been said that men and women are from different planets – men are from Mars and women from Venus. So it's no wonder they behave very differently. Here are a few examples from a list that the pastor recently sent me.

DRESSING UP: A woman will dress up to go shopping, water the plants, empty the garbage, answer the phone, read a book, get the mail, etc. – and she will dress up differently all the time.

A man will dress up only for weddings and funerals. Otherwise he prefers to wear what he can grab.

BATHROOMS: A man has seven items in his bathroom – a toothbrush/paste, shaving cream, razor, deodorant, a bar of soap, shampoo, and a towel from the Holiday Inn.

The average number of items in the typical woman's bathroom is 437. A man would not be able to identify most of these items.

MONEY: A man will pay \$2 for a \$1 item he wants. A woman will pay \$1 for a \$2 item that she doesn't want.

OFFSPRING: A woman knows all about her children. She knows about dentist appointments and romances, best friends and favorite foods and secret fears and hopes and dreams.

A man is vaguely aware of some short people living in the house.

FUTURE: A woman worries about the future until she gets a husband.

A man never worries about the future until he gets a wife.

– *that's a bad one, but often true* –

MARRIAGE: A woman marries a man expecting he will change, but he doesn't.

A man marries a woman expecting that she won't change and she does.

We laugh about these remarks but they are more serious than we want to admit. Let me ask – there anybody here who has NOT experienced one of these differences ?

The differences between men and women are often a cause for major problems in a marriage because both partners assume that theirs is the only natural way a human being should behave and feel. Many husbands and wives believe that their mate somehow got a few details wrong, but that constantly exposing them to the “right way” would do it. They believe that the things that build them up, should also make their partners happy. They believe that they make themselves perfectly clear when they communicate. They believe that they can fulfill the sexual & romantic desires of their partner if they only extrapolate from their own feelings.

WRONG! WRONG! WRONG!

Especially in these areas — self-esteem, communication style, and sexual & romantic satisfaction — men and women are fundamentally different. And we can't assume that our partners will find fulfillment if we give them what WE like. If we ignore that, our marriage will soon be in serious trouble, because neither of us has the chance to play our own role and find fulfillment as a man or a woman. But if we accept it as a gift from God, then we can use these differences to complement each other's weaknesses and to build a strong marriage.

3.1 Ways to build Self-Esteem

In Christian circles there is a great amount of misunderstanding about self-esteem. It is often identified with self-love or selfishness and this characterized as evil. But self-esteem is something different – it is the deep knowledge that we are *valuable*. Most people know this in a very abstract way (**Psalm 139:14**: I am fearfully and wonderfully made, **Luke 12:24** (Sparrows)). But this knowledge is not deeply rested in our hearts, unless we are constantly reminded of our value, that is if we find *outer indicators* that show us visibly that we are valuable.

In young children, the ways to build such self-esteem, is centered around the visibility of God's gifts: beauty, strength, and intelligence. But when we grow up, the value that we assign to these gifts gradually diverges. For men, the value of beauty and also physical strength shrinks rapidly while beauty and remains important for women for a long, long time. That's why we don't talk about a lady's age once she is above 25. But besides the value that we assign to God's visible gifts to us, we also value our *achievements* very differently and thus try to reach different goals in order to feel valuable. So let me ask you, both men and women: what is it that builds *you* up?

ACTIVE PHASE: Divide the blackboards in two halves and summarize. Try to get men involved.

Roughly it can be said that a man's self-esteem is built up by what he can *do* or in other words, his achievements in the outside world. In contrast to that, a women's self-esteem is built up by *relationships* she can nurture. That's why the *home* and the *family* are so important for a woman while a man must be successful *at work*. Remember – the woman was designed as nurturer while the man's role is the provider and leader. A man, who is successful at work and a failure as husband and father still views himself as success while with women it is usually the other way around.

A man *must have authority over something* and his work gives him the chance to see this need fulfilled. He must have the feeling that he is *connected to some higher purpose* and the family alone does not fulfill that need. But of course this higher purpose takes its toll on a man, because it is a world of constant competition either with other people or with goals that need to be met.

Many women see their husband's involvement at work as threat to their marriage and do not understand that he is needy when he comes home after work. He cannot just turn the switch, forget about work, and immediately pour all his energy into the family. If a wife cannot accept his, her husband gets the impression that she does not respect him and does not care at all about this world that is so important to him.

Now you may say – a woman has her needs as well and she has waited all day long to share them with her husband. That is definitely her right, but she does not get these needs fulfilled if she puts demands on her husband the moment he enters the door.

Instead – and this may sound strange at a first glance – the best way for a wife to turn her husband into a man who cares about her needs, is to to care for his! (**Luke 6:38** ... Give and it will be given to you). Ask yourselves – *how can I minister to the world that my husband constantly faces*. Obviously you should not do his work, but he must know that you *care* even for that strange world. Pray for his job, and ask him what to pray about. Ask about *what* he is doing and how prayers were answered. It will only be natural that your husband will soon care more for what you experience, because now you are doing ALL things together.

By the way, a hint for men whose wives find it difficult to relate to their work: tell them a little more WHAT you are doing, what your typical day is about, and why sometimes it is so strenuous for you. If possible, show them your workplace. If you share more of your world, your wife will be more interested in it.

3.2 Communication style

The next major difference between men and women is the way we talk to each other and the way we listen. These differences are the source of a great amount of misunderstandings, sometimes with severe consequences. We thought that we have made ourselves perfectly clear and our partner reacts in a completely inappropriate way that we hadn't expected at all. Sometimes we say something completely innocent and our partner almost explodes and we have not the slightest idea why.

How can this happen? To explain this I like to summarize a few insights from communication science. We have to realize that communication between two human beings is quite complex because it involves much more than just words with a clearly defined meaning. We actually communicate in three ways

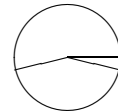
Blackboard

Words we speak – Tone of voice – and Body language

Does anyone want to guess how much we express in each of these ways

Draw circle

Body language 55% – Tone of voice 38% – Words 7%



So the words that we speak actually account only for 7% of what we communicate. To illustrate that, people have made experiments where tone and words do not match. One of the most striking example happened in a church after the service. When the pastor asked “How are you?”, one person answered (**friendly/happy tone**) “Oh fine – I just murdered my grandmother” – and nobody noticed what he was really saying. Or how would you react, when your husband tells you (**stretch out arms defensively**) “I love you”? Would you believe him? These are very extreme examples but communication can become very confusing when words, tone of voice, and body language do not match – particularly if one of the latter ones is negative.

Another aspect of communication concerns the message itself. When we listen, we watch for three aspects, namely information about

Blackboard

Facts (what has happened?)

Relationships (how does this affect me/us?)

and requests (what shall I do?)

In most cases we clearly understand what should be expressed because there is a cultural agreement how certain statements should be understood. If we hear “supper's ready” we know that we are expected to come to the table. If someone asks us if we know what time it is, we know that a simple “YES” wouldn't be the right answer.

But sometimes our partner does not hear the message that we really wanted to express. For instance, when a wife shares a problem with her husband, she often only wants to be comforted, but he understands it as request to solve the problem. Or when a husband tells his wife, that he has read about an interesting job offer, she might already think about the consequences of moving to another city while he simply wanted to express that he found that ad interesting. Particularly in the last example,

you can't really tell what the right understanding of the husband's message is, because we can associate different meanings to the same words – and the way we do this may not necessarily be correct.

Men and women have different ways of expressing what they mean and different ways of understanding a message they hear. Well, I am sure you had your experiences with that, so let us summarize a few “typical male” or “typical female” types of communication.

ACTIVE PHASE: Divide the blackboards into men/women and note specific communication styles.

- *Men talk about facts and actions that need to be taken*

Men only hear the facts

Because of the focus on facts, men seem not to pay attention to the tiny details of daily life and do not talk about such issues. Especially they do not seem to be aware of problems that have no “logical” relation to an event or plan.

Men appear to listen well, you hardly see any reaction

- *Women include emotional aspects in ALL their decisions*

Women hear emotionally

For men it seems that women do not to come to the point, because they dwell so much on “unimportant details”. But they also seem to react way before they have heard the full story.

Women usually give stronger feedback, both verbally and non-verbally

Women often start a conversation with an “open question”. They have mastered the skill of queries that draw people out. For husbands who come home exhausted from work, this is more than they can handle.

These differences are not to be weighed as more positive or negative. They both have their advantages and disadvantages. But problems come up if we don't accept these differences as fundamental aspect of our mate's personality. If we hear something that does not seem to be right or could even be understood as insult, then we shouldn't assume that our partner had evil intentions – it could simply be a misunderstanding on OUR side. If we notice that our partner does not even understand the simplest thing that we are trying to tell him, it is not that he doesn't want to or is to stupid – it is because we have different ways of expressing ourselves.

Many marriage problems just start with simple misunderstandings in a communication. I am sometimes astonished how a simple issue can stir up a serious fight, where each partner begins to choose words that are in no way uplifting. But this should not be so. **1.Peter 3:10** tells us

KJV: For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.

Let us keep this verse in mind the next time we run into a communication problem. React in a positive and uplifting way to clarify the situation, because what you heard might not be what your spouse has said.

For those who still find this difficult, here are a few hints that communication science gives us.

Blackboard

- Practice ACTIVE LISTENING

Pay complete attention when you listen. Be open minded. Respond by giving verbal or nonverbal feedback. Be sensitive to the needs of your spouse. Try to listen for hidden messages but do not assume your right – check it out by rephrasing what you believe to have heard.

Actually, it is quite an interesting exercise to do do the latter: Have one partner express something and let the other try to rephrase that until the first one agrees that this was exactly what was said. You will be astonished how grossly you may have misunderstood a message.

- Use “I” statements instead of “you” statements. “You” statements often close the door to further discussion and make your partner defensive while “I” statements open the door to a calm and open conversation. Just consider the difference between

“I did not understand what you just said” and “You did not make yourself clear enough” or even “You never get to the point”.

- Use uplifting words (**Proverbs 16:21–24**)

There are a lot of good books and communication seminars that offer many helpful techniques for improving our communication skills, and I think even Christians can profit from a few practical hints.

3.3 Competition

The next difference is not really a major, but still a separate point: *men need success in competition*. That is part of their nature as provider and protector. They must feel capable of protecting their family in a hostile world. Women also feel the urge to compete but there are other aspects of life that are more important for them. They sometimes rather lose to keep a relationship intact. These differences are there for a purpose. We wouldn't be able to fulfill our God-given roles if it would be otherwise. Of course, this built-in desire to compete can result in extreme, unhealthy competitions, even among Christians. When competition becomes pride and rivalry, then something is wrong about it. Then the efforts men put into competition become a threat to their marriages: he will be constantly exhausted and loses his ability to share feelings or to admit insecurities and failures – even to his wife. On the other hand, he

is emotionally dependent on his wife. But how shall he get his emotional needs filled if he does not share anymore?

So men, watch yourselves. Are there any signs of excessive competition in your life? If so, set your priorities right: you just have to be able to provide for your family and protect it – you don't have to be better than others (read **2.Cor 10:12**).

And for the ladies: if you notice that your husband doesn't share feelings (anymore), don't complain or draw things out of him. Instead you can help him to improve his communication skills about emotions – that is your God given strength. Be affirmative and create an environment where he feels secure – that is, where there is no need to be strong or to be able to defend himself. Men always have difficulties to share emotions – you are the only one who can make it easier for your husband.

You see, we always come back to the same distribution of roles and responsibilities between men and women. Without his wife, his helper and nurturer, the men will easily get stuck in undesirable extremes of male behavior. He is actually quite helpless. On the other hand, if his wife helps him to become the man and husband that God wants him to be, she will see her needs

Give, and it shall be given unto you; a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, shall be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

That's again Luke 6:38 – we could make this our memory verse for this class.

3.4 Sexual & romantic satisfaction

Finally, let us come to a topic that can be a source of major disappointment in a marriage, because we talk so little about it. Sex and our approach to it presents another big difference between men and women.

Uh! This is difficult to talk about! We weren't raised to discuss such things openly. I certainly wasn't – not before I became a Christian and, with a few exceptions, definitely not afterwards. For some reason God's perfect gift of sexual attraction and mutual fulfillment in a marriage is either associated with shame or viewed as too intimate to talk about – *even among wife and husband*. No wonder it becomes a source of problems – if we don't even talk about it.

Well, of course we don't want to discuss intimate details here – that would certainly break your privacy – but there are still obvious differences how a woman or a man wants to be treated to feel happy about her or his sexual life.

Let us start with a brief look at **1.Cor 7:3-5**

KJV: Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

So a healthy sexual relation is central for a healthy marriage. A lack of it can lead to serious temptations and significant problems. God has given us the gift of sex in

a marriage as the closest possible union of man and woman. I was raised catholic and taught that the only purpose of sex is to have children – otherwise it's bad. Particularly you shouldn't experience any lust in it because lust is particularly evil. I have met older men who were proud of having slept with their wives only 3 times to have three children – I don't know how they could suppress their desire for each other.

This is not what the bible tells us. Children are NOT the main purpose of a marriage, although a natural “byproduct”. They are not even mentioned in Genesis 2:24. Sex was created is for mutual fulfillment: a man is to enjoy his wife and a woman is to enjoy her husband.

BUT ... men and women enjoy sex differently. I am not an expert on this, but roughly, you can say that women rarely separate romance and sex, because sex is a reflection of how she feels about life. Many men can easily separate this and enjoy sex just for the sake of the moment. There is nothing bad about this – it is just different.

Personally, I find it difficult to separate sex from the rest of our marriage life. If there are nagging problems in the back of my head, if I had a tough day, if I don't sense that Barbara is really romantically interested, or if we had an unresolved argument during the day – then I don't feel any desire at all. I must feel balanced in myself and in harmony with Barbara. But I admit, it may be easier for Barbara to get me into the right mood than the other way around.

ACTIVE PHASE: – does anyone want to comment what he or she thinks encourages desire – or is an absolute killer?

Divide blackboard in two halves and start with a few examples, mark male/female

Encourager: balanced / feeling of harmony / some men say they like to be seduced (M)

Typical killer: dirty, smelling husband (F) / arguments / wrong time (too late/tired) / of course sickness / fear of failure (M) or not being able to satisfy wife (big problem sometimes)

But we do not only develop desire in different ways, we also have different objectives in a sexual encounter. The encounter itself is not the goal but it confirms our masculinity or femininity and it accomplishes the affirmation of our ego. This, of course is different for men and women.

I have to go a little by the books in this case because I noticed that I can't generalize my own feelings to well. But I believe it is right to say that the ability to “perform sexually” is crucial for a man to feel as a *real man* – at least up to a certain age. Particularly when a man reaches “mid-life”, a good sex life gives evidence that he is still vivid and reassures him, that he is not too old yet.

For women, affirmation means having a feeling of closeness and love. You can't have that in a brief sexual encounter, no matter how intense it may be. It is much more important to spend time together where this feeling of closeness and being loved can intensify.

ACTIVE PHASE: would any man or woman be willing to comment on this?

If we ignore the different objectives of our wives and husbands our sex life can become very frustrating, especially if we don't know how to talk about this to each other.

Timing is crucial here, because sharing your needs in the wrong moment can sound like criticism. For a man this can be devastating because any criticism attacks his ego – but he needs his ego to be affirmed, not threatened, so he won't react very gracefully if his wife brings up the topic in the wrong way.

On the other hand, the wife is probably the only one who can bring up the subject at all. But when she does, it must be in an affirmative manner and never express that he does something wrong. Instead of discussing what is wrong, let him know what you would like to have and discuss ways how he could help you to achieve this. Same content, but positive phrasing – that is the way to his heart. I know that sounds difficult, but after all, you want to see improvements – don't you?