

From Broken to Beautiful
A Primer on Marriage Counseling
Week 10 – Understanding Marital Roles

Introduction:

Big Statement:

Marital roles are God-ordained ways for a husband and a wife to show agape **LOVE** to one another. Consider the following text:

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.
(1 Corinthians 13:1–3)

A spouse may be the best provider, the best cook, the best mechanic or handyman, but they are not motivated by love for God and love for others, then it profits them nothing. Being a biblical husband or a biblical wife is all about expressing love to the other within the roles that God has designed and called us to.

Definition of Terms:

Biblical Manhood:

Man, as an image bearer of God, has been called to reject passivity and accept responsibility to create and cultivate, to add value to systems, and to lead people towards **SHALOM** within his God-given sphere of influence.

Biblical Womanhood

Woman, as an image bearer of God, has been called to render support to others, to nourish and care for their surroundings, and to cultivate meaningful relationships for the spread of **SHALOM** within her God-given sphere of influence.

Shalom is far more than the absence of conflict. It refers to a state of tranquility or wholeness where everything exists in right form, serving a right function, and producing a right outcome in perfect harmony with the intentions of and under the blessings of its Creator.

Notice that neither of these definitions says anything about the typical behaviors we often associate with manhood and womanhood. But it's interesting that if a man hunts bear with his teeth that's celebrated as manly and if a woman is crafty and can cross stitch a dress, that's celebrated as womanly, but if you flip those behaviors around it's not celebrated, but rather ridiculed. If a woman is into hunting and sports, she's called a "tom-boy" and unless a man is sewing a "Batsuit" being crafty isn't celebrated, but rather mocked.

What these definitions are seeking to do is lay out the underlying design structures because listen, a male can hunt, fish, repair cars and build houses and that doesn't mean he's fulfilling his God-given purpose as a man. Likewise, a female can cook, sew, knit, and make babies but that doesn't mean she's fulfilling her God-given purpose as a woman.

Complementarianism:

Refers to the fact that God has created men and women equal in dignity and worth as His image bearers and yet He has assigned them **DIFFERENT** functional and relational roles for the fulfillment of the divine mandate to multiply and fill the earth and to subdue it and have dominion over it.

This idea stands in contrast to egalitarianism, which says that male and female are equal in every way and possessing no definitive differences. So, the idea is that God has designed male to be male and female to be female and those roles are meant to compliment one another like the left-hand and the right-hand clasping together in unity.

Male cannot accomplish the divine mandate alone and female cannot accomplish the divine mandate alone. So, there is no place for feelings of superiority or inferiority. Competencies, skills, and abilities run the gamut between male and female. The design remains the same.

Question:

What specific data gathering questions would you ask to better understand the relational and functional dynamics present in the counselee's marriage?

Who does the dishes? Who disciplines the kids? Who typically takes the lead in spiritual matters in the home? Who is responsible for paying the bills and why? How often do you argue about basic household responsibilities? Are one of you responsible for something you do not feel equipped to be responsible for?

Understanding Marital Roles:

See Ephesians 5:22-33

The Role of the Wife (vs.22-24):

Based on her design, the primary role of the wife in marriage is to render support to her husband and joyfully "come under" or **SUBMIT** to his leadership, as to the Lord.

The idea of submission isn't very popular now days, but it's important to remember that everyone is under authority in multiple ways and before Paul commands wives to submit to their own husbands, he first speaks to the fact that, if a Christian is being filled with the Spirit, they will have a general disposition of mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21).

Proverbs 31:10-31 can be helpful.

- Submission is as much about **ATTITUDE** as it is **ACTION**.
- This does not mean that she cannot **VOICE** her opinions.
- This does not mean that she cannot work **OUTSIDE** the home or make money.
- This does not mean that she must accept **ABUSIVE** behavior.

Wives are to submit to their own husbands as a **GIFT**, first to the Lord and then to their spouse. This submission is not based on the performance of the husband, but on the person and work of Christ. This is to maintain marital **INTIMACY**, especially in conflict, and to enable her to fulfill her design.

I need to say three things here. First, a husband cannot make his wife submit. The best he can do is to make her obey, but that isn't the goal. He should lead her in a way that makes submission a delight. However, the command isn't predicated upon his performance and whether he deserves it. Third, because submission is first and foremost unto Christ, the expectation of submission stops, in that moment, if a husband asks his wife to sin.

The Role of the Husband (vs.25-33):

Based on his design. The primary role of the husband is to be a **SERVANT LEADER** to his wife who demonstrates the same **LOVE** for her that Jesus has for the Church.

- The husband is to provide **SPIRITUAL** leadership in the home (Ephesians 5:26-28).
- He is to work for her **GOOD** (Ephesians 5:28-30).
- He is responsible to **OUTFIT** the family for success, which is defined as the ability to glorify God in their circumstances (1 Timothy 3:4, 12).
- He is called on to do the **HARD** things (John 13:12-17).
- He is to protect her **HEART** (1 Peter 3:7).

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)

I tell husbands that they don't need to understand women. They just have to understand a woman. The command is to get and earned PHD in their wife. And I would contend that the Peter's use of the term "weaker vessel" has little to do with the fact that most women tend to be physically weaker than most men. It has everything to do with the fact that a woman's heart tends toward selflessness and generosity, but it is easily broken and hard to repair after the damage has been done (a porcelain doll versus a toilet – both are made from porcelain, but it far thicker than the other – fragile).

Question:

A godly marriage (where each spouse joyfully does his or her part for the good of the whole) serves as an apologetic for the efficacy of the Gospel (Ephesians 5:32), therefore, how would you explain the connection between a Biblical marriage and the power of the Gospel?

It shows the power of the Gospel to overcome out inherent selfishness. It provides a relationship that is only to be broken by death rather than proximity or sin. It highlights the beauty and necessity of forgiveness and repentance. It provides a platform for unconditional love so that the world can see agape love with "skin on."

Question:

What are your questions concerning marital roles and responsibilities?

[Allow for Responses]

We need to make sure that we try to keep our own bias from infecting the counseling relationship and imposing models and paradigms that the Bible doesn't impose in terms of what is "manly" and "feminine" behaviors. A couple may be able to flourish in a division of labor that we would not personally want, but that doesn't mean it is sin.

What I will say is that God has a design for manhood, womanhood, marriage, and the family and when we depart from that design, we always move toward pain. A small deviation results in a small amount of pain, but it can grow over time, if the couple doesn't communicate well to overcome it.

Homework:

- The Role of the Wife by Wayne Mack
- The Role of the Husband by Wayne Mack
- Who Does the Dishes pamphlet by Winston Smith

Conclusion:

These truths can be summed up by saying, "Men don't dominate, and women don't emasculate." These sins will always make marriage go badly. Men are called to take responsibility and lead others toward shalom. Women are called to support that leadership and create nurturing relationships for the spread of shalom.

The world outside the church house disagrees with these roles and yet where men and women work together, leveraging their strengths in accordance with their God-given design, fulfilling their responsibilities to Him and to one another, submitting themselves to the Lord in love you cannot argue with the fact that His design works.