The #1 Reason Why Christian Marriages Fail

The Bible tells men to treat their wives as equals. But in a machismo *culture, this is easier said than done.*

Whenever I travel to Latin America I usually carry a pair of handcuffs in my suitcase. I use them as a visual aid when I'm preaching about the *machismo* attitude that is so prevalent in that region. I remind everyone in the audience that *esposa*, the word for *wife* in Spanish, is the same word used for *handcuffs*.

Esposas.

Why would the word for wife be the same word for a form of bondage? Because women in many Latin countries suffer unthinkable abuse in the home. Puerto Rico, where I spoke last week, has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in Latin America, and many women die there every year at the hands of their partners.

"When we are teaching about marriage in the church, let's throw away the handcuffs. Let's quit promoting erroneous notions about male domination and get back to what the Bible really says."

You'd think this problem would exist only outside the church, but women are beaten in many Christian homes in Latin America—even in pastors' homes.

Abusive behavior is tolerated partly because of an incorrect interpretation of Scriptures about wifely submission, but also because the church has not confronted wrong cultural mindsets of male superiority.

This macho pride is not unique to Latin America. It is the reason many women kill themselves in India; it is why so many African women have been abandoned in poverty; it is why Middle Eastern women are forced to live under tents of heavy fabric in hot climates. Male superiority is a global problem—and it is the No. 1 reason Christian marriages suffer and fail.

No matter what country I visit I remind men that God created man and woman as equals in the Garden of Eden (see Gen. 1:26-28) and that male domination is a result of Adam and Eve's rebellion (see Gen. 3:16). When Christ died for us, He broke the curse of sin and made it possible for a husband and a wife to enjoy equal access to God and, as a result, intimate fellowship with each other. He never intended marriage to be about hierarchy, domination, control or abuse.

To any man who is struggling with an abusive tendency (physical, sexual or emotional) or with an attitude of male superiority, I urge them to take these three Scriptural steps:

1. Treat your wife as an equal. It's true that God asks women to submit to their husbands, but in the same passage He tells husbands and wives to submit to each other (see Eph. 5:21). When talking about sex in marriage, Paul taught that married people have authority over each other's bodies (see 1 Cor. 7:3-4), again stressing the concept of mutual submission. And Peter warned husbands that their prayers would be hindered if they do not treat their wives as a "fellow heir of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7, NASB).

Those skeptics who think Christianity is prudish, old-fashioned and male-dominant have not read the Bible. The gospel of Christ not only restored human beings to God but reaffirmed the dignity of women and their equal value. When a husband understands this, and treats his wife with equal respect, his marriage reflects heaven.

2. Serve your wife selflessly. Many Christian husbands ignorantly think Scripture gives them the right to boss their wives around, bark orders, demand sex or manipulate with threats. They interpret the verse "the husband is the head of the wife" (Eph. 5:23) to mean that they can sit in their recliner like a king while their wives do all the housework and take care of the children with no help from them. That is not a marriage; that is slavery.

Paul

introduced a radical concept in the first century: “Husbands, love your wives,
just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25).
This is the opposite of *machismo*. A
husband who loves Jesus will get out of his recliner and help with the dishes,
play with the children and share the burden of family responsibilities.

3. Encourage your wife’s spiritual gifts. I’ve known many Christian men over the years who kept
their wives under tight surveillance. They didn’t want them to further their
education, start careers or assume leadership roles because they viewed them as
inferior (and because the wife’s success exposed the man’s insecurity). Yet
God’s desire is for a husband to be his wife’s biggest cheerleader. The husband
of the Proverbs 31 woman, for example, praised his wife—not only for her virtue
but because of her success in the marketplace (see Prov. 31:28-29).

Jesus
Christ, through the gospel, has the power to subdue the male ego. Jesus can
also give a woman the amazing ability to be patient when her husband has not
yet learned how to treat her with the respect she deserves.

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Let’s quit promoting erroneous notions about male domination and get back to
what the Bible really says.

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