

Theological Foundation

- 1. Our Union with Christ fundamentally and permanently changes our identity** (John 1:12; Romans 5:10; 8:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 12:13, 27; 2 Corinthians 5:17, 21; Ephesians 1:3-14, 22-23; 2:1-5, 13; 4:17-24; Colossians 1:13-14; 3:4; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 John 3:1, 2).

- 2. Our Union with Christ makes no gender distinction** (John 3:16; Acts 2:16-18; 9:1-5; Romans 2:11; 3:23; 6:23; 8:28-30; 12:1-2, 4-5; Galatians 3:7-28; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2:6-10; Colossians 3:9-11; 2 Corinthians 6:18; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 John 2:2).¹

- 3. Our Union with Christ (our identity) is the foundation for our marriage roles, responsibilities, and relationship (not-our-identity). It does not replace or supersede it. It builds upon an already existing relationship (with clearly defined relational expectations)** (Ephesians 5:21, 22).

¹ That's not to say that gender doesn't matter. We each live out our identity as Image Bearers (Genesis 1:26-27) who are United to Christ in an engendered body — as either a male or a female.

Theological Foundation Conclusions for Husbands

1. **Before I ever think of my wife as my wife, I must first think of her as my sister in Christ.**

2. **How I treat my wife matters INFINITELY! She is a daughter of God and the bride of Christ.**

3. **I have been stewarded an incredible responsibility and role: to love her like Jesus loves her** (Ephesians 5:25; 1 John 2:3-6). I am not lord, king, god, master, or boss. She is not my servant, maid, sex-object, or live-in-nanny. I am not free to order her around, make all the decisions, insist she give up her dreams/goals/career, require sex whenever I feel like it, or demand obedience. Under no circumstances am I to be harsh or domineering (Colossians 3:19). “I should just as easily treat my wife harshly as I should punch myself in the face.”²

4. **My job is to sacrifice for her and give endlessly/give up myself for her because that’s what Christ did for us** (Ephesians 5:25; John 15:13; Galatians 5:13-14).

5. **Every single one of my actions are to be loving to her** (1 Corinthians 13:4-8; Mark 12:30-31; 1 Peter 1:22; Colossians 3:14, 19; Ephesians 5:25, 33; John 13:34³) **and truly best for her** (Ephesians 5:25-27; Romans 13:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). **I am to love her as much as or more than I love myself** (Ephesians 5:28-30). **While leading her, I am to honor and respect her** (1 Peter 3:7) **and submit to her** (Ephesians 5:21). **I must continually work at understanding her** (1 Peter 3:7) **and I must not become bitter against her** (Colossians 3:19).

6. **My life will show my heart, and my actions will make plain what I actually believe** (Luke 6:43-45; Colossians 3:1-17; Galatians 5:19-26).

² Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church*, p. 72

³ Love never wields Bible verses like 1 Corinthians 7:5. Submission cannot be taken but only ever given.

Theological Foundation Conclusions for Pastors

1. **I must be a godly, God-pleasing husband and treat my wife like Christ would.** I am held to the highest of standards because not only is she given into my care as my wife, and sister, but also as church member (1 Peter 5:1-4; Hebrews 13:17). I cannot wield my authority as husband and my authority as pastor like a double-edged sword against her.

I must be an example for other husbands to follow. I must not be/become “one of them” or else, I lose my ability to teach, train, and disciple them (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

2. **I must teach and train and disciple other men to treat their wives like Christ would.**
3. **I must guard the flock (God’s daughter, Jesus’s wife, my wife, my sister, a church member for whom I am accountable) from savage wolves even if those wolves have the title “husband” (Acts 20:28-31).**
4. **In the end, be faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2) and humble (1 Peter 5:5). Be patient, upright, and endure suffering and hardship from without and within (2 Timothy 2:3-7; James 1:2-4; John 15:18-21; 1 Peter 1:3-9; Philippians 1:29), knowing that someday you’ll receive the crown of life (James 1:12). Stand for truth (1 John 1:5-10), disciple the few (2 Timothy 2:1-2), and above all keep loving the people around you like Christ loved you (John 13:34-35; 1 Peter 1:22-23). Lay down your life for those in your care (John 14:15; 15:13; 1 John 2:3-11).**

Parting Thoughts

- 1. We say we believe this but does our life show we actually believe this?**
- 2. In conservative circles, we have tended to look at the Bible through the lens of marriage. And we have tended to look at marriage through the lens of submission.**
- 3. We have at best, a bad definition of submission. And at worse, our definition is ungodly.**
- 4. We often ignore our own pastoral advice in not letting the clearest parts of Scripture interpret the less clear parts.**
- 5. All authority is derived from God which means authority is good when properly used within the boundaries and for the purposes God gave it.**

Foundational Resources

Books

Men and Women in the Church (Kevin DeYoung)

Worthy (Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher)

Is it Abuse? (Darby Strickland)

Domestic Abuse booklet (Darby Strickland)

Talks/Sermons/Podcasts/Videos

“What is Domestic Violence?” (Chris Moles)
(<https://ibcd.org/what-is-domestic-violence/>)

“I Am Not a Victim” (Joy Forrest)
(<https://ibcd.org/i-am-not-a-victim-overcoming-domestic-abuse/>)

Articles/Journals

“What Does My Ongoing Sin Say About Me?” (Scott Hubbard)
(<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-does-ongoing-sin-say-about-me>)

“Hyper-Headship and the Scandal of Domestic Abuse in the Church” (Jason Meyer)
(<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/hyper-headship-and-the-scandal-of-domestic-abuse-in-the-church/>)

“Am I Responsible for My Husband’s Sexual Sin?” (Darby Strickland)
(<https://www.ccef.org/am-i-responsible-for-my-husbands-sexual-sin/>)

“Abuse is Biblical Grounds for Divorce” (Joshua Sharp)
(<https://www.baptiststandard.com/opinion/voices/abuse-is-biblical-grounds-for-divorce/>)

Practical Foundations

1. **Pray** (like the wind, sister!)
2. **Be right with God yourself and then lean HEAVILY upon God’s Spirit for help and leading**
3. **Get help from those who understand abuse and oppression**
If someone doesn’t understand abuse and oppression, they will absolutely do more harm than good.
4. **Realize that at the bottom of it, if it is an abusive situation, the husband and the wife are telling two different stories.**
One story, as a whole, is true and other one, as a whole, is untrue. It is not two different sides of the same story.
5. **Because the wife is the only one who really, truly knows who the husband is, she is the only one who can interpret him rightly.**
Therefore, she gets to “call the shots” and direct the process. Unless it is clear sin (and even then, the word “appeal” would be much better), we should not tell the wife what to do. She’s likely spent her whole married life being controlled and told what to do.
6. **It’s not loving to oppress someone. And it’s not loving to let oppressors continue to sin against God and others.**
The most loving thing is to point out someone’s sin and call them to repentance.
7. **Recognize that this is a spiritual battle that has been going on for much longer than you have been a part of it**
This is Good v. Evil, God v. Satan, Life v. Death, Right v. Wrong (1 John 2:3-6). Do not let yourself see it, at the core level, as marriage problems, misunderstandings, unmet expectations, or poor communication skills.
8. **Do not let yourself idolize the concept of marriage over the covenant of marriage**
In an abusive marriage, the picture and the covenant of marriage have already been broken by the abuser. Jesus would NEVER treat us the way the abuser treats her. It doesn’t mean that the marriage is over and the covenant broken permanently but we must call it what it is biblically in order for repentance to take place.
9. **Don’t remove the personhood of each involved. Focus on the people not the marriage.**
Don’t settle for a marriage definition of “living in the same house.” That’s not a marriage.
10. **Marriage counseling will not work in an abuse/domineering/coercive-control situation**
You must talk with each person alone. And it will probably take some time before you get the full story from the wife. She is still processing and sorting through everything. And that says nothing of her trust-level of you.

11. You cannot assume that since it hasn't been physical abuse yet that it will not get there

Just like any sin, abuse always escalates over time as old methods no longer work. James 4 teaches us that we do what we do in order to get what we want.

12. These things *must* take time

Time is your best ally. Time will reveal the truth and reveal hearts. Do not rush this! Set a realistic expectation for yourself and for those you are serving. Think in terms of years not days and months.

13. Always ask the question, "Who benefits?"

If you keep getting "the husband" or "the wife" as the answer, you're probably dealing with a power dynamic not a mutual relationship.

14. Look at the fruit

Don't hurry. Again, take your time. Look for patterns. Observe the "tree" of the person's life. What is inside will always, eventually come out (Luke 6:43-45). Take fruit that looks alike (Galatians 5 and Colossians 3 are great for this — both the ungodly and God-pleasing examples) and group it together. Then step back and look at the fruit you've gathered.

15. Tell him no and watch what happens

Abuse and oppression always stem from an entitlement mindset. Those who are entitled do not take being told "no" well.

16. Look at character and actions rather than listening to words

The idea here is to push pause on what the person is saying and just watch. Again, what's stored up in their heart always, eventually comes out (Luke 6:43-45).

17. Look at how he uses Scripture

Does he arrogantly wield it/misuse it for his own gain or does he humbly submit to it for the good of others?

18. Love him enough to not let him jump through hoops or short-circuit his repentance

Sorry is not repentance. Saying you repented is not repentance. Bearing fruit is repentance (Luke 3:8; 6:43-45). A new pattern and a different/changed track record is repentance. Both of which take time. You'll know it's repentance when you see it. Never forget that repentance doesn't remove consequences of past sins.

19. Is it a mutual relationship or an over/under?

Are the husband and wife equals or is one superior/over the other one, exercising domination? Can she say "no" to him with zero consequences? Is she free to have a different opinion than him? Who is in control?

20. To do nothing to protect the victim is to side with the abuser