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Who is the Leader?

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Who is the Leader?

“Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:22)

There it is. One of the most fiercely debated Bible verses concerning marriage. “Why should the wife do all the submitting?” That is the hot question. But here is the greater truth: the wife is not the one who needs to do all the submitting ... this verse does not stand alone.

Remember the one before it? “... *submitting to one another in the fear of God*” (Ephesians 5:21).

And here’s one more: “*Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others*” (Philippians 2:4).

So what does submission really mean? Actually, the matter of submission becomes important when opinions differ over a decision even with all the facts on the table. The only solution is to submit to the judgment of a tiebreaker.

Tom and Dennis had been friends for years. Both were computer wizards and had held executive positions. Across the years, they talked often about their work and developed respect and admiration for each other. Both had saved large sums of their huge salaries. They pooled their savings and purchased a consulting company, which provided computer training and assessment for large corporations—a dream come true.

Now these fine, experienced, Christian gentlemen could pool their knowledge. It would be great fun to work as equal partners. They had a nice, new building with an expensive conference room. Here they held their idea sessions.

Soon, they realized they had some acute problems. They differed about handling employees. They were having trouble dividing up the responsibilities, and neither knew enough about accounting.

Their fancy conference room could not solve their problems. Even friendship, knowledge, experience, and dedication were not enough to settle the differences.

Most of their problems resulted from having done things differently—and successfully—for years. Tom was used to giving instructions and expecting them to be carried out. He had been the boss. So had Dennis. Now they were partners—with

brilliant, but differing ideas. It was not a matter of right or wrong.

They were able to discuss their differences. They clearly defined and understood each other's viewpoints. But they deadlocked when it came to making decisions. Honesty, understanding, respect, knowledge, and experience did not settle the deadlocks. The theory that two friendly partners can each do their own thing was not working.

They were frustrated and irate. They even had a few shouting matches, with both of them storming angrily out of their beautiful conference room—and ultimately into a counseling office.

We agreed there were two basic problems: (1) each had turned to his own way and (2) both needed God's love.

Sound familiar? So what should they do? First, each one of them needed to repent, asking God to forgive them individually and to fill their hearts with His love. They needed a love that is patient, does not seek its own way, is not provoked, and rejoices in the truth (as described in 1st Corinthians).

Tom and Dennis did this, but they still needed to resolve their differences. They went to an outside consultant who really dropped a bombshell: "You must choose a president who will then settle the disagreements."

But...but...we are equal partners.

"True. However, there is just no other way to solve your disagreements. You also need outside help with your accounting."

This was a bitter pill to swallow, but it was either follow the advice or lose the business.

After weeks of agonizing, they chose Dennis to be the president. They spent the next months dividing up responsibilities and developing policies and procedures both of them could live with.

Both men preferred managing the sales and neither one wanted advertising, purchasing, or supervising the office staff. But all the work had to be done. Here is how they distributed some of the duties:

1. Tom managed the office, personnel relations, and maintenance.
2. Dennis got sales, advertising, and engineering.

3. They divided purchasing. Tom made the purchases for the office; Dennis for external needs. Tom became technical director.

They were still equal partners, both vitally interested in all areas of the business. They consulted each other, reviewed any decisions they wished to, and participated equally in making them. Tom had the last word in the office with Dennis contributing his knowledge occasionally. In the field, Dennis made the decisions with Tom contributing his knowledge occasionally.

However, Dennis, as president, had the last word in any decision. Rarely did he overrule Tom, but it did happen occasionally. They once were deadlocked over whether to buy a new or used computer. It almost killed Dennis to overrule his knowledgeable friend, but there was no other way. They could not argue endlessly over a machine.

The business grew and prospered. Tom and Dennis enjoyed working together. They learned to know each other better and developed confidence in each other's decision-making ability—a process that took many months.

As Tom and Dennis reviewed their rocky beginning, both admitted they were vaguely aware the question of the last word would have to be settled. They had pushed the question out of their thinking, hoping it would go away. They both wanted to be president, but their pride made it impossible for them to make the selection.

Let us switch from Tom and Dennis to your marriage.

You are equal partners making decisions in marriage. Responsibilities must be divided up. You need policies, procedures, and rules in order to work cooperatively as well as independently.

There are some mothers who could not possibly take on any additional family responsibilities. Then, there are those moms who breeze through the chores at home and are ready for something else by 10:00 a.m. every morning.

When my wife and I first started in this business of raising a family, we got together and listed all of our responsibilities. (Notice I said our responsibilities, not my wife's responsibilities or my responsibilities). Just a few of the many we detailed were housecleaning, money management, cooking, writing, radio work, children, cleaning the yard, travel planning, running a business, raising money, and food purchasing.

Then we divvied them up. My wife got money management, travel agent, housecleaning, cooking, children, food purchasing, and a bunch more. I was assigned writing, radio work, cleaning the yard, running a business, and raising money. These were assignments on the basis of training, ability, interest, and necessity.

How we met the responsibilities was not the question. The assignment was simple: these were the responsibilities each of us was to carry out. If my wife decided to add responsibilities outside the home, fine. But she would have to figure out some way to carry out the primary tasks for our family that we had agreed upon.

The same went for any other activities I took on. It was okay as long as I kept my primary family responsibilities going. Of course, the tasks kept changing as the children grew and demands on our time changed.

In all our planning and assigning, we kept one thing in mind: that plan of ours had to be a family plan. We made sure to remember that it was a Brandt plan, not Henry's plan or Eva's plan. It was our plan, and we had to carry out our responsibilities.

Remember, you are equal partners. You are both vitally interested in all areas of the marriage. As in a business, consult with each other and participate in making decisions and reviewing them.

The wife usually has the last word in her areas of responsibility. She is the decision maker; her husband, the resource person. In his area, the husband makes the decisions, and his wife contributes her knowledge. Mostly they work independently in their areas within mutually agreed upon guidelines.

You will enjoy working together as you know each other better and gain confidence in each other's decision-making ability. Developing faith and trust takes many months. Forging a new way of life from your different backgrounds takes time and patience.

To illustrate how a husband and wife practice submission to one another and to the head, here are three decisions made at our house.

Once, my wife and I decided to buy a stereo. It would be a pleasant feature in our home. So we went shopping together, happily expecting to make an easy choice. We looked at one for \$70 and another for \$700. One of us preferred the cheaper model;

the other the expensive one. We got so hung up on the decision, we tabled it until the next evening. It would be simple. The best viewpoint would win.

The next evening I let her go first. I could hardly believe her presentation. Jumbled. No logic. No substance. How could she present such a feeble point of view?

When my turn came, I was confident, thinking, "She will be impressed with my presentation." So I gave it. It was systematic. It considered all aspects. It was logical. Funny thing, though. She did not think so. My presentation did not convince her to change her point of view. We were deadlocked!

We were facing one of those situations in marriage where everything had been said that could be said. All the facts were in. Still, we were on opposite sides.

And it will happen to you. Regardless of how dedicated or friendly you are, there will be deadlocks like this in your marriage. It is a controversial issue, but it must be settled.

Here comes the answer to how you settle a deadlock in marriage. There is only one way. The husband has the last word. He has two options: 1) make the decision himself, or 2) ask his wife to make it.

I settled the stereo deadlock by making the decision on which model we bought.

It was a grave, serious moment when Eva and I were deadlocked. She was as committed to this marriage as I. She and I both wanted the best for the marriage. This was not the time to be selfish or ignore her judgment. It took a few days to ponder the issues, but the responsibility for making the decision was mine. Soon, we were past the decision and enjoyed years of pleasant listening.

Here's another decision we had to make.

We were moving into a new home and had to decide the layout and decor of the kitchen. We both agreed that I knew nothing about kitchens. Eva had been around them at least thirty-five years, and besides, she was the one who would use it.

Who do you think should have carried the ball on kitchen decisions? The answer was obvious-Eva! That is how it was. There was no deadlock or even any question. It was obvious she would have the final say. We had many discussions about how to do it, but in this case, she was the decision maker and had the last word. After all, she was the expert and the expert should make the decisions.

Here's a time when we compromised after many discussions. The children even tossed in their opinions this time. It had to do with buying a new couch. The one we had was an unsightly piece of furniture, really broken down.

Although we had little money to spare, we did have just enough for a new couch. Eva and I were ready to buy one when a complication arose. School let out for the year and the children, who ranged in age from ten to fourteen, wanted to accompany me on a speaking trip a month later to Boston.

Only one catch. We did not have enough money to go to Boston as a family and still buy a couch. It was one or the other. Which to do? We batted it around for a few weeks. I discussed it with Eva. Eva discussed it with the children. I discussed it with the children. We all discussed it together at meals.

Either way, the family would have to do without something. A couch or a trip. It was a tough decision. I found myself on both sides of the question. So did Eva and the children. We kept tabling the matter. Finally, there were only a few days left before we would have to leave on the trip.

One point kept coming up in all the discussions.

"Dad, I sort of like our couch even though it is all beat up," one of the children would invariably say.

And it was true. Even the gang from church seemed to enjoy the old couch. They would come in and throw their bodies into its beat-up frame without any reservation or worry of further damage.

"Well, I guess we have done OK with this couch up to this moment. Another year will not hurt us."

With that comment, I decided to take the family with me to Boston.

We came home, happy with the trip but still facing a decrepit, old couch. During the next year, all of us at one time or another wondered if we had made the right decision.

The couch was so bad that when we replaced it a year later, we called Goodwill Industries to come and take it away. And, you know, they turned it down. We had to put it out with the trash.

Some seemingly easy decisions can become complicated. There are no clear-cut solutions. But when the decisions are made, the issues are settled. You go on from there. However the person who is leading settles the deadlock, both must submit to the decision and do all in their power to make it work.