

# American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 [www.americandecency.org](http://www.americandecency.org)

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

November 2015

## Love and Respect: Basics for Marriage

by Douglas Wilson  
from [DesiringGod.org](http://DesiringGod.org)



Scripture teaches us that Christians should honor or respect all men (1 Peter 2:17). Every human being bears the image of God, and so, of course, we are called on to respect and honor that. And of course, Scripture also teaches us to love our neighbor (Lev. 19:18), and Jesus in his famous story makes the point that our neighbor is whatever person God has placed right in front of us (Luke 10:29–37). So all Christians are to love everyone, and all Christians should honor everyone. That is the baseline.

But when we come down to the particular relationship of husbands to wives, and wives to husbands, Scripture gives us an important, additional em-

phasis. Husbands are told specifically to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25). Wives are told specifically to respect their husbands as the church does Christ (Ephesians 5:33).

There are three things that we can take away from this. The lessons are not limited to three, but we should make a point of grasping at least these three things.

### 1. We Are Called to Love and Respect

First, the commands are directed to our respective and relative weaknesses. We are told to do things that we might not do unless we were told. For example, children are told to obey their parents because it is easy for children not to do so (Ephesians 6:1). In the same way, husbands are told to love their wives because it is easy for husbands not to do so. Wives are told to honor their husbands because it is easy for wives not to do so. We are called to do things that might not occur to us. If we were all doing these things naturally, why bring

it up?

Women are better at loving than men are. Men do well at respecting. C.S. Lewis once observed that women think of love as taking trouble for others — which is much closer to a scriptural agape love than what men naturally do. Men tend to think of love as not giving trouble to others.

So men must be called to sacrifice for their wives, to take trouble for them, as Christ gave himself for the church. Women must be urged to respect their husbands. A woman can naturally love a man she does not honor or respect very much, and this is something that Paul would identify as a trouble. How many times have we heard a terrible story about a girl returning to her abusive boyfriend because she “loves him,” even though he treats her like dirt? But if we asked her if she respects him, she would reply, “Are you kidding? Him?” And men must be called to give themselves away for their wives. This is what a wedding means.

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## 2. Men Run on Respect, Women on Love

Second, the command reveals something about the needs of the recipient. In other words, if the Bible said that shepherds should feed the sheep, a reasonable inference would be that sheep need food. When husbands are told to love their wives, we can infer from this that wives need to be loved. When wives are told to respect their husbands, we can infer from this that husbands need to be respected. Think of it as two kinds of car that run on different kinds of fuel — diesel and regular, say. Men run on respect, and wives run on love.

In saying this, remember that we are talking about emphasis. On a basic level, everyone needs to be loved and everyone needs to be respected. But when Scripture singles out husbands and wives living together, the men are told to love and the women are told to respect. Flip this around, and you see that men should remember that their wives need to be loved, and their wives should remember that

their husbands need to be respected.

Remembering this keeps us from giving what we would like to be getting. George Bernard Shaw once observed that we should not do unto others as we would have them do unto us — their tastes may not be the same as ours. I once knew a husband who got his wife a nice shotgun for Christmas. She was a shrewd Christian woman, and so the following Christmas, she got him a nice string of pearls. And as she told my wife, “they were very nice pearls.”

Often when a marriage is in a tough spot, both spouses tend to give what they feel they need — love and respect, respectively. Wives reach out to their husbands with love, when respect is what would really help. Husbands can back away, thinking of this as a form of respect, “giving space,” when what they need to do is close in with love.

## 3. Both Are Powerful to Produce Change

But third — here is where it gets glorious — love and respect are both potent. The Bible teaches that this kind of love is efficacious.

This kind of respect is powerful. This sort of love bestows loveliness. This kind of respect bestows respectability.

Husbands cannot duplicate the love of Christ, which efficaciously made his bride lovely. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). But while we cannot duplicate this kind of love, husbands are told to imitate it. And in imitating it, we see some of the comparable effects. A woman who is loved by her husband is a woman who will grow in loveliness. He washes her with the water of the word (Ephesians 5:26). The entire passage assumes that this kind of love bestows loveliness. And the same kind of potency can be found in a godly woman’s respect. Peter tells us that reverent and chaste behavior can break down a man’s disobedient spirit (1 Peter 3:1–2).

So then, men and women should love and respect each other. They should do so with all their hearts. But when they are concentrating on their marriages, the men should lean into love. The women should lean into respect. The results can be astonishing.

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