

Who Does the Dishes?

Decision Making in Marriage

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Who's responsible for disciplining the kids?
Who should be in charge of the checkbook?
Who does the laundry?
Is it okay for a wife to work outside the home?
Can the husband stay home and be a homemaker?
How do you decide which family responsibilities belong to you and which belong to your spouse?
For many couples, answering these questions is difficult and frustrating. Since marriage is God's idea, it makes sense to look for answers in the Bible. But you won't find there a simple, one-size-fits-all "to-do" list for husbands and wives. Husbands aren't commanded to take out the trash. Wives aren't commanded to change the baby.

That's actually a good thing. Rigidly defined roles would restrict you to tasks that might make sense for your marriage in some circumstances, but not in others. Instead of giving you a list of set duties, God, in the Bible, does something much better. He gives a few basic principles to help you and your spouse define your roles in a godly way no matter what your life is like.

Love Is Your First Responsibility

Love is the bedrock principle. No matter what your culture, traditions, or preferences are, the Bible teaches

that in every relationship your first responsibility is love. The apostle Paul, writing to people who were squabbling about their roles in the church, said, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. . . . and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1–2).

No matter what your role is, no matter how important you think your job is, no matter how good you are at it, if you’re not acting in love, then what you do has no value. *No matter how marital roles are defined, they are only different expressions of love.* Often when we discuss marital roles we never ask the most important questions: Am I expressing love to my spouse through this role? Am I carrying out my role in a way that benefits my spouse? God calls husbands and wives to act in love for the benefit of the other.

Biblical Authority Is About Responsibility and Care

So the overarching principle is love. What else does the Bible have to say about marital roles? When the Bible discusses marital roles, it seems to place a lot of emphasis on authority. Ephesians 5:22–33, Colossians 3:18–19,

and 1 Peter 3:1–7 instruct wives to “submit” to their husbands. What role does authority play in marriage?

When you think about the role of authority in marriage, you can go wrong in two ways. You can make the mistake of reducing marriage to a relationship between the ruler and the ruled. That’s a distortion of biblical authority. God does not permit husbands to be tyrants or call wives to live as pawns (Ephesians 5:28). Or you can make the opposite mistake and dismiss the place of authority in marriage as so distasteful and destructive that the Bible can’t possibly mean what it says about authority in a marriage relationship.

Both of these mistakes can be avoided by understanding how Jesus turned traditional authority roles upside down. The passages in Ephesians, Colossians and 1 Peter aren’t just an overview of marriage; they are spelling out guidelines for how authority should work in Christian relationships. In the ancient world, roles were rigidly defined and a sign of one’s status and worth. In the radical new kingdom Jesus established, everyone has equal worth and status. Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in

Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26, 28). All children of God have the same spiritual status. Husbands and wives are to view each other with this understanding. Peter instructs husbands to understand their wives as “heirs with you of the gracious gift of life” (1 Peter 3:7).

There is still authority in Jesus’ kingdom, but it has a new goal—the care and welfare of others. Once two of Jesus’ disciples, James and John, asked Jesus for a favor. They wanted to sit on his right and his left in glory. They wanted to be second-in-command to Jesus! Jesus responded by saying, “You don’t know what you are asking.” He went on to tell them that he came to suffer and die for the sake of his people, to rescue them from their sin. Finally he said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:38, 42–45).

Jesus makes a radical distinction between the way he exercises authority and the way the world does. Authority should not be about status and power, as the