In a recent series1 at The Village Church, our pastor made the statement that men are intended, as part of God’s creative design, to be the primary breadwinners of their families. In light of the recent questions which this has raised, I thought it might be helpful to expound a bit upon this understanding.

The Scriptures clearly testify of the equality of man and woman in regards to position, value, essence, and nature. At the same time however, the word of God also reveals that men and women have unique roles, especially within the home and church. Therefore, while the genders are fundamentally equal, they are functionally distinct.2

One of the aspects of the unique role of man as husband and father is provider for the family. While this is certainly implicit throughout the Biblical text, it is made more explicit in at least one passage:

In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church...

Ephesians 5:28-29

Particularly important in this passage are the two verbs which are used to describe how men take care of themselves and, by relationship, how they are called to take care of their wives. Those verbs are *nourish* and *cherish*.

The Greek word translated nourish is used in a couple of other passages in which the intent is provision. This is made especially clear in the Greek translation of Genesis 45:11 where Joseph says to his family, “There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.” In other words, Joseph was taking the responsibility to provide for his family’s physical needs in light of the approaching famine.

The Greek word translated cherish is only used one other time in the New Testament. 1 Thessalonians 2:7 “But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.” In the context, Paul is writing of his desire as an apostle to equip and build up the church like a mother does with her child.

From the context of Ephesians 5 in particular, there is a clear Biblical mandate for husbands/fathers to take the initiative and bear the primary responsibility in regards to the provision of their homes. Like Joseph provided food and a land for his family, so husbands are responsible for feeding and housing theirs; as a mother feeds and covers her child, so a husband bears this responsibility toward his family.

The major feedback which we received regarding the statement from Matt’s sermon was situational in nature. Are we saying that men must earn more than their wives? Are we saying that a man who is physically or mentally unable to work is sinfully neglecting this call? The answer to both of these questions is no, by the way.

There are four issues saturating our culture which our position seeks to combat. In highlighting these issues, our understanding should be made more clear.

First, we live in a society where freedom and equality are seen as the highest ideals. However, as Elisabeth Elliot has noted, equality is not necessarily the ultimate as far as Christian ambitions. In fact, our faith calls us not to stress our own rights, but, as Christ, to deny and empty ourselves, preferring the interests of others above our own (Philippians 2:1-11).

Second, our culture assumes that equality of nature negates any sort of hierarchy in regards to role. However, as 1 Corinthians 11 in particular makes clear, this is not Biblical. Though man and woman are essentially equal, a husband is still called the head (implying, among other things, the responsibility to lead, protect and provide) of his wife. This is further reinforced by the reference to the Father as the head of Christ. Though the Father and Son are absolutely equal in regards to their divine nature, the Son has eternally and willfully subjected Himself to the Father in all things. Equality of nature absolutely does not demand equality of role. Man and woman, father and mother, husband and wife: these are not interchangeable roles.

Third, our society is one driven toward extremes. On one end of the spectrum, we have husbands and fathers who spend their time playing X-Box or golf when they should be providing for the emotional, physical and spiritual needs of their families. Such latent laziness is not to be praised, but is to be rejected as immaturity at best. On the other end of the spectrum are those

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1 Men as Husbands was from the weekend of August 19, 2007 and can be found [here](#).

2 This position is best developed in Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood by Wayne Grudem and John Piper. For teaching by the Village staff, ask for a copy of “A Theology of Manhood and Womanhood” by Geoff Ashley.
husbands and fathers who are so intent on providing for physical needs that they neglect the spiritual and emotional needs of their families. Ultimately, what your children need are you and not a new toy.

Lastly, we live in a time which is rampant with materialistic idolatry. The effect of such is that many wives and mothers work not to provide food for their children, but so that they can drive a Lexus instead of a Civic. This is very, very dangerous ground.

To spend your life providing for wants while neglecting needs is surely the essence of foolishness. To my knowledge, there are no texts which say that a parent must buy the latest toys and clothes for their children, but there sure is a lot in there about commending the works of God to the next generation.

While it is certainly not inherently sinful for a woman to work outside of the home, to do so at the neglect of her call within the home certainly is. While it is not necessarily sinful for a wife to earn more than her husband, reliance upon her income in order to supply a life of excess should certainly cause some degree of concern. These are weighty matters which must be judged not on the basis of formula, but by truly pressing in and searching the desires of the heart, willing that they be bound in captivity to the Scriptures.

All things considered, husbands are called by God to be the primary breadwinners of their families. They are called to physically, emotionally and spiritually nourish and cherish their wives, while presenting a pattern of responsible leadership within the home. Certainly there are times in which the ideal is not possible (when a man loses his job, has a longer-term illness, etc.), but the rule still stands.

Our hope is not to stifle either gender, but rather to recapture the divine design for the sexes within the home. We fully believe and teach that in obedience to the Lord and in submission to His word is found the most freedom, joy and rest.

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