

Counseling Wives of Unsaved Husbands

Pastor Wesley Rowe

Biblical Counseling Training Institute

a ministry of Calvary Bible Church

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Number of Christian Wives Married to Unsaved Husbands Who Attend CBC.
At least **19** and maybe **4-6** more!

2. Unique Problems That Christian Wives of Unsaved Husbands Face.
 - A. No spiritual encouragement at home
 - B. Christian values contested by unsaved husband
 - C. Interference with church attendance
 - D. Berated, belittled for Christian faith.
 - E. Differences in philosophy of rearing children.
 - F. Differences in schooling of children.
 - G. Encounters regular use of drugs/alcohol.
 - H. Unsaved husband demands wife work outside of home to support and/or help support family.
 - I. Unsaved husband forbids wife to tithe.
 - J. Unsaved husband misuses family income.
 - K. Unsaved husband influences children against Christ and toward another religion.
 - L. Unsaved husband forbids wife to take children to church.
 - M. Unsaved husband forbids Christian friends in home
 - N. Unsaved husband uses pornography/demands “kinky” sex or demands wife engage in sinful activities.
 - O. Unsaved husband plans weekly weekend trips.

3. Key Questions That Christian Wives of Unsaved Husbands Ask
(Christian wives of unsaved husbands have asked Pastor Rowe all of the following questions over the past 3-5 years!)
 - A. “Do I have to submit since my husband is not a Christian?”
 - B. “When do I have to submit?”
 - C. “Can I ever disobey?”
 - D. “Should I skip church when my husband wants me to?”
 - E. “Should I tithe?”
 - F. “Should I go to the bar or parties with him?”
 - H. “What do I do when he wants me to watch sleazy or pornographic films with him or go to a movie like this?”
 - I. “Should I bring my children to church if he says I can’t?”
 - J. “Should I have my believing son/daughter baptized when he says no?”

- K. "Can I withhold/hide money from my husband who drinks and gambles it all up?"
- L. "What do I do when my husband won't work to help pay our bills?"
- M. "Should I buy his beer/liquor when I am shopping when I know that he is going to get drunk?"
- N. "Do I have to buy my husband's cigarettes?"
- O. "What do I do when my husband allows our kids to watch television that I think is harmful to them?"
- P. "He wants me to go to Vegas and gamble with him and I don't want to be in that environment. What do I do?"
- Q. "I promised that I would never tell anyone what he and I did, but I now think that I should tell. What do I do?"
- R. "My husband wants me to call his employer and lie about him being sick. Can I do this?"

II. A BASIC THEOLOGY OF FAMILY LIFE

1. Through the Institution of Marriage God Created the Human Family.

A husband and wife alone make a family unit. Children do not make a family. Without children, you have a family unit. The birth or adoption of children adds to the family.

TPT principle should be adhered to even in marriages where wife is saved and husband is unsaved.

COUNSEL and ENCOURAGE: Counsel the wife to live her life in such a way that both the unsaved husband and all the children know that she is primarily and deeply committed to her husband, over and above, a secondary commitment to her children (Obviously, there are exceptions to this).

2. God Has Established Government in the Human Family, Consisting of: husband, (head of) wife, both husband and wife (head of) children

COUNSEL and ENCOURAGE: Counsel the wife to model submission and respect to her husband (and the children's father) in the presence of the children. Remember, the essence of the sin nature is self and because the husband is unsaved, in most cases he will "insist" on receiving his rightful place in the home due to his sinful ego. The Christian wife should have no contention with this because she recognizes that God has set up the government of the home with the male as head. COUNSEL and ENCOURAGE the Christian wife to faithfully model respect and submission to the husband at all times and to teach this to the children. It is not the lifestyle of the unsaved husband that requires submission and respect from the wife and children. It is the position (head!) that God has assigned to him. When COUNSELING help the wife think through what submission and respect looks like. Further, when COUNSELING help the Christian wife to see the myriad of opportunities available daily for living out

submission and respect in the presence of her unsaved husband and for her children to behold.

COUNSEL the Christian wife to memorize and meditate upon Colossians 4:5-6 and I Corinthians 7:14-16.

PRAY with them often over these verses.

3. No Human Relationship, Even Biological Ones, Is To Be Valued and/or Loved More than Christ.
 - A. Matthew 10:34-37 (Lk. 14:25-26).
 - B. Luke 9:57-62
 - C. The way the oft repeated statement (“God, family, church”) is most often used and understood is not Biblical! Further, the statement “God created the family first and the church second, so the church is less important than the family” is also greatly misused and does not reflect the whole of Scripture (especially *Biblically Theology*).
 - D. It is possible for biological family members to become a “god”. “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3).
 - E. Beware of the “cult” of the family in American culture today.
 - F. Chuck Swindoll on church discipline:

“I Corinthians 5:11, “I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-not even to eat with such a one”.

That’s a direct quote, in context, correctly translated from the Greek text. I checked. If it means anything, it means this: Isolation is one of the consequences when a believer adopts an unbiblical lifestyle. Taken literally, that means *everyone* who names the name of Christ should refuse to take the edge off the carnal Christian’s loneliness. *Even family members are to cooperate with the divinely ordered isolation until there is repentance.*”(emphasis mine) (Guard Your Heart, Swindoll, p. 40).

COUNSEL and ENCOURAGE: The ultimate goal of Christian wife must be to please Christ, not to “save the marriage” or “keep the husband”. Saving the marriage or keeping the husband is a worthy goal, but it is a secondary goal. It is never to be the ultimate goal. When “saving the marriage” or “keeping the husband” becomes the ultimate goal, the Christian wife has become an idolater through making these an idol of the heart and Christ is no longer supreme Master. (Saving the marriage/remaining in the marriage is part of pleasing Christ-I Cor. 7- and the wife *must* remain in the marriage if her unsaved husband is pleased to do so.). However, according to I Cor. 7, she is to let him depart if he so chooses. She is **not** to relinquish her commitment to Christ in order to keep him!

4. A Key NT Text That Specifically Addresses Christian Wives of Unsaved Husbands (I Peter 3:1-7)

This text tells us that Christian wives of unsaved husbands are to be marked by the following six characteristics:

- A. “the observable behavior of submissiveness” (v. 1)
- B. “the observable behavior of purity” (v. 2)
- C. “the observable behavior of reverence for God” (v. 2)
- D. “the observable, unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit” (v. 4)
- E. “the observable recognition and respect for of the husband’s position of authority” (vv. 5-6).
- F. “the observable trust in God to work it all out as she submits to an unsaved husband who could take advantage of her” (v. 6).

COUNSEL and ENCOURAGE these attributes. COUNSEL the Christian wife to pray for these Christian graces and to lay down her life for the Christ life.

COUNSEL and ENCOURAGE: The spirit and heart attitude of the Christian wife toward her head is vitally important at all times and in all situations. She must not contend, fight, argue, scream at her husband, or disrespect him. Conversely, she is allowed to “gently instruct” (explain/witness) her convictions to her husband and her submission to Christ.

God has promised that through godly living by the Christian wife, He will work in a special way to bring her unsaved husband to Christ. The Scriptures illustrate that God loves to save whole families. When God has saved one family member, it is often because He has elected the whole family to be saved!

5. Are Christian Wives Required To Submit To Unsaved Husbands? Yes!

COUNSEL: The Christian counselor must faithfully encourage the Christian wife to submit to her unsaved husband even when she does not “feel” like doing so. At those all too frequent times when our emotions are “disengaged”, we walk by faith. In response to faith which always leads to obedience, God the Holy Spirit gives strength and joy.

6. Are Christian Wives Required To Always Submit To Unsaved Husbands? No!

Are Christian wives allowed to ever disobey unsaved husbands? Yes!

- A. Acts 5:1-11 (Ananias and Sapphira are proof of this. Sapphira should have disobeyed her husband in this situation of lying to the church body and leaders!)
- B. When are Christian wives allowed to disobey unsaved husbands? No authority, but God!, is an absolute authority or power (Acts 4:19-20). When a husband expects, requests or demands words, attitudes, or actions from the Christian wife that sets her against God, she is not only free to disobey, she must disobey!
- C. What happens if the husband seeks a divorce because he no longer likes “the changes” in his Christian wife? Or, what happens if the husband seeks a divorce because the wife “won’t do the things that she used to do with me?”

COUNSEL: The Christian church must step up to the plate and help the Christian wife. Further, they must be willing to even find living quarters for her and help to support her through the divorce.

- D. What happens if the husband “beats” or “physically abuses” the Christian wife due to her Christianity?

COUNSEL: The policy of Calvary Bible Church is to encourage and even assist! the wife in filing assault charges against the unsaved husband. The Christian wife might choose to not file charges and that is her choice. However, if physical health or life is in danger, the elders STRONGLY insist on it.

E. What happens if the husband “verbally abuses” the Christian wife?

COUNSEL and ENCOURAGE: There is no marriage that does not have some degree of verbal abuse (as it is defined by the American Judicial System today). It is unrealistic to expect that there will never be verbal abuse in any home.

Obviously, there are degrees of verbal abuse, some being much worse than others. However, verbal abuse was experienced by Christ, the Apostles, and Christians throughout the ages and through Christ’s power living in them and flowing through them, they were able to respond in a godly and righteous way. Many Bible passages speak to this issue and they all encourage us to endure it (I Pet. 2:18-23, 3:13-17;5 Matt. 5:11-12, 43-48; II Cor. 6:3-10).

COUNSEL: Counsel the Christian wife to make use of the opportunities of sin against her to learn to love unlovely and undeserving persons. Is this not what Christ has done with us (Rom. 5:8). The counselor must remember though that the wife who is being verbally abused will need to be regularly encouraged and reminded that the issue is **NOT** her, but her husband’s sinful heart. More than likely, she will struggle with very low self-image and esteem after having been beaten down for years. The Christian counselor must COUNSEL and ENCOURAGE and CHALLENGE the Christian wife to think of herself as Christ views her, not as her husband says she is.

7. Final Suggestions

- A. Make sure you keep Christian wives of unsaved husbands regularly in the Word. They should be held accountable for daily devotions.
- B. Make sure you keep Christian wives of unsaved husbands in regular fellowship with other women in the church.
- C. Pastors/pastor’s wives, along with the church body, should be extra sensitive to the spiritual struggles and emotional needs of Christian wives of unsaved husbands. Be extra supportive, kind, encouraging when in their presence.
- D. Consider setting up a special support group for all the Christian wives of unsaved husbands.

