

An Example of Gaslighting of Women and Dismissing their Views

Using a blog post by Emerson Eggerichs sent to us by readers who wanted our take on it. While this podcast and report focus on him and his book Love & Respect, the tactics he uses here to dismiss women's viewpoints and to elevate men's are, unfortunately, all too common.

This blog post and report will hopefully help people recognize red flags.

Original Blog Post: [Not Wrong, Just Different and Valuable](https://www.loveandrespect.com/blog/not-wrong-just-different-and-valuable)

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On September 18, 2019

The blog post is in black text, written by Emerson Eggerichs. If he edits the online version after we downloaded it, it may not line up anymore. But this is what was there as of September 18, 2019.

The other colours are comments inserted by me and other members of my team before we recorded the podcast that aired September 19, 2019. This is not a transcript of the podcast, but only the notes that we were working from.

Let me start things off by saying that my team and I have been reviewing Emerson Eggerich's recent blog posts and while we still find a lot of things that concern us, we also have seen some growth. He has actually acknowledged in some recent posts that women might desire sex, too. He is adding more caveats about abuse in his talks, apparently. However, most people interacting with Emerson Eggerich's material are not doing so by reading a blog post. Instead, they are reading Love and Respect. We are grateful that Emerson Eggerich seems to be understanding more and more the importance of the arguments we're making and we hope that he will take the next step to withdraw Love and Respect.

Here's his blog post:

During the two decades I've spent teaching the Love and Respect message, based on Ephesians 5:33, the feedback and responses I've received from readers, conference attendees, and small group participants has ranged from eye-popping, marriage-saving revelations to "I agree for the most part, but you don't know my situation"

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to downright rejection of God's instructions to the married couple. Though the responses vary, the one constant remains: God's Word commands the husband to love his wife unconditionally and the wife to respect her husband.

So which category did we fit into? No recognition that other people see things differently and have different interpretations of God's plan for marriage. Add to the end.....and for both spouses to submit to one another in love.

Note: If people reject Love & Respect, he's saying they're rejecting God's Word. So he's equating Love & Respect with God's word, right off the bat. If you disagree, you're in rebellion.

I'm going to draw out his syllogism and the issues with it because I think it's illustrative and might help here

Here, Eggerich is essentially arguing the following syllogisms:

1. If Love and Respect is based on scripture and scripture is authoritative, then Love and Respect is authoritative
2. If it is wrong to reject scripture and Love and respect is scriptural, then it is wrong to reject Love and Respect

First of all, let me point out that conflating rejecting Love and Respect's message with rejecting scripture is a really big claim and it doesn't hold water. In my posts about the book and in numerous letters readers' have sent to me and to Focus on the Family, Eggerich's hermeneutics have been called into question. I don't want to relitigate all of that again, but let me sum it all up by simply pointing out that Eggerich's entire argument is based on one verse in Ephesians, which flies in the face of the oft-cited exegetical approach that "scripture interprets scripture." Eggerich has ignored a lot of scripture to come to his particular reading of Ephesians 5:33 and so it just isn't a good faith argument to say that to reject his argument is to reject the Bible.

Let's remember what Love & Respect says about sex--

Another one from chapter 19: If he complains about your weight, and you turn around and bring up how he uses porn or drinks heavily, you're wrong. So feeling that porn use is worse than a woman gaining weight is in rebellion against God. Let's continue.

The variables in this instruction are the individual recipients—the thousands upon thousands of husbands and wives who are coming to the Love and Respect message from a multitude of views, backgrounds, and experiences, then interpreting and processing God's Word based on those unique differences. This is why from time to time I receive emails like this one in which a new kind of problem has arisen since the Love and Respect message was heard.

“This material is excellent and much needed. We have read the book and attended a conference and been blessed by the material. We have just completed facilitating our first small group DVD teaching. We are hesitant to do another until we deal with the following issue. There is one area we are having difficulty with and want very much to discuss it with someone. For the most part the men in our small group are not "getting" that their wives have insight also. There being a scriptural command to respect and value men does not give license for them to disregard what their wives think. If there is one weakness in the material, we are finding it is the omission of the value of a woman's insight; not as the leader but as an integral part of information gathered for the decision-making. . . . While this is not a problem in our own marriage, it seems to be a major one for the other couples. Listening to the material seems to have swung the pendulum the other direction so far. How to love your wife is being translated into a condescending attitude. Hope you can help.

This makes total sense. In a situation where one person is allowed to demand respect and under no obligation to show it in return, you are going to get this kind of unidirectional dynamic. Sheila and I totally don't follow this idea that a woman respect her husband and a man love his wife. We both strive to love each other unconditionally and respect and value each other. I think most normal people recognize that both men and women want to be loved and both men and women want to be respected. And that is the way that we all know healthy marriages work. Nobody would ever be happy being 100% loved and 0% respected or vice versa, but when you start making these rigid, proscribed roles, you start getting these kind of caricatures showing up and it's unhealthy.

A couple of things: He says this is a “new kind of problem.” However, he refers to this problem IN THE BOOK ITSELF.

From pages 282-283: “Now whenever he senses anything that smacks of disrespect, even when it isn't, it reminds him of our pasts and he gets infuriated. I haven't seen such rage in awhile... Actually, I regret letting him know what I had learned from you because he used it against me each time... I can take on the criticism - I feel I deserve it - but his rage is withering and makes me want to get away and hide.”

What is the problem here?

This woman says, “the men in our group are not “getting” that their wives have insight also.”

Then she says: “How to love your wife is being translated into a condescending attitude.” That says to me that the men are treating their wives WORSE after reading the book, because they think they have license to do this. She says: “Listening to the material seems to have swung the pendulum the other direction so far. “

That is something that we heard again and again in response to our series. The saddest one from a woman whose husband became a Christian 7 years into their marriage. He then read *Love & Respect*, and changed the way he acted. Before that, they consulted each other and treated each other like partners. After, he ordered her around, stopped listening to her, and told her that every time he didn't like something she was being disrespectful. Her question to me: "Why is it that he was a better husband BEFORE he was a Christian?"

[For more comments about Love & Respect, read our complete report about the book here.](#)

I think that's what this woman is asking from her small group, too. What if he's managed to convince them that the man is supposed to make the decisions and be a leader and the wife is supposed to be quietly submissive, but what's happened is that the husbands are now condescending? They're disregarding their wives? What are we to do?

That's the problem she's asking in the email.

Now let's look at how Emerson responds to this problem and how he frames it.

"How to love your wife is being translated into a condescending attitude." That is an interesting statement and one that deserves attention. And while I received only one side of the story here (the women's side), it is important to address other possibilities and investigate whether or not this could be another pink and blue communication problem.

Obviously, any man who does not esteem his wife while they interact on various issues nor seeks to live with her in an understanding way as an equal, which includes empathizing with her opinions, misses two major letters in C.O.U.P.L.E.: Understanding and Esteem—the acronym I use to illustrate how a husband spells love to his wife.

Additionally, we read in Proverbs 31:11–12, "The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life." The Bible challenges a young husband to trust the heart of his wife and to believe that her actions toward him are for good and not for evil. Obviously, a husband should welcome his wife's trustworthy heart and good actions.

We also read in Proverbs 19:14: "House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord." Why would a husband live with a prudent wife—a wife with practical wisdom and godly knowledge—and not want to receive her recommendations and

counsel? It makes no sense for him to deprive himself of that treasure. And if he does so, he is straight-up rejecting a gift from the Lord.

Let's take this rhetorical question that he is asking: "Why would a husband live with a prudent wife—a wife with practical wisdom and godly knowledge—and not want to receive her recommendations and counsel? It makes no sense for him to deprive himself of that treasure. And if he does so, he is straight-up rejecting a gift from the Lord."

There's quite a few 'obviously's in there. "Obviously a husband should esteem his wife". "Obviously he should welcome her input" What is not obvious to Eggerich, though, apparently is the whole point of this woman's email - namely this: that after listening to his (Eggerich's) teaching husbands are NOT doing these things. In fact, they are WORSE AT DOING THEM THAN THEY USED TO BE!

Obviously, I think we should be asking the question, "Why is that?" And I think there is this underlying theme in this whole movement about respecting men meaning that women somehow don't need respect and that's clearly ridiculous, but yet here we have a clear example of men doing just that based on this teaching.

Let's also remember that in Love & Respect, Emerson Eggerichs talked at length about how women were easily deceived. He misquoted the Genesis passage--how Eve was deceived, and then she brought the fruit to Adam--instead the Bible is clear that Adam was WITH her (Genesis 3:6)

But he says that women should not listen to their intuition, aka the Holy Spirit, but to their husbands. Husbands must make the decisions and she should realize that he has insight that she doesn't have.

I have so many issues with this, which I have talked about at length.

Okay, so if I wrote something and people said, "Hey some people are doing this bad thing based on what you said" I would respond with "Well, that's not what I meant. Here's what I meant" But Eggerich doesn't do that. Why the hedging. Why the "I'm only hearing the woman's side" and "We need to think of this from the husband's point of view?" Does he really think this is a communication issue? The woman is saying, "Our husbands aren't listening to us or our input anymore" and he is saying "This might be a blue and pink communication issue". What does that MEAN?!?" Is there some failure to communicate? Like, he actually IS listening, but in BLUE and she isn't understanding that because she is thinking in PINK?"

To me this is a no brainer. Husbands should listen to their wives. Wives should listen to their husbands. DUH!....

However, could there be something else going on here with the couples whose wives are accusing their husbands of having condescending

attitudes? Pay close attention to these scriptures:

"And the contentions of a wife are a constant dripping." (Proverbs 19:13)

"Better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman." (Proverbs 21:19)

"Better to live in a corner of the roof than in a house with a contentious woman." (Proverbs 25:24)

"A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious woman are alike." (Proverbs 27:15–16)

Oh this got me really mad. Four verses in a row about how annoying women are.

Does God hate women?!?

So the men get a couple of "obviously they should listen AS LONG AS SHE IS SPEAKING THE RIGHT WAY" and the women get four Bible verses saying "You are annoying; Shut up."

And the whole "as long as she is speaking the right way" drives me crazy. Truth is truth and you are an idiot if you don't listen to truth wherever it comes from> Bible is full of quotes like that.

The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice. Prov 12:25
Through insolence comes nothing but strife, But wisdom is with those who receive counsel. Prov 13:10

The one who gives an answer before he listens--that is his folly and his shame. Prov 18:13

I find it both telling and deeply concerning that *that* barrage of Bible verses didn't happen, but the other one did.

Is this what he thinks of women? These women say that their husbands are being condescending, and you quote four bible verses about how horrible it is to live with a complaining wife?

Think about it this way: we call a man "meticulous" but a woman is "nagging". A man is "authoritative" but a woman is "bossy." I just find those examples really sobering and I think

it's important, whenever we talk about women nagging or complaining, that we make sure we aren't resting on a trope or stereotype that isn't actually based in fact.

Back to Emerson:

God doesn't tell husbands to listen to contentious wives but to listen to respectful wives. Which way should a husband interpret his wife? Is she a prudent wife voicing concerns to which he must listen? Or is she a contentious wife who is expressing her disgruntlement over the fact that periodically her husband puts his foot down and breaks the pattern of her getting what she wants?

By the way, I missed the verse where God says not to listen to contentious wives. Technically it just says they are annoying. So all those other proverbs about listening are still out there.....

Yep. He's also setting up a dichotomy here: Either she is a wise wife, and he would have no reason to disregard her, or she is a contentious wife, and he doesn't have to listen to someone who is disrespectful.

Where's the other option? What about HIM being a problem? That never seems to occur to Eggerichs.

That's the whole point. When you set up a system where one person has the authority and power and they SHOULD listen to the other person, but have no obligation to do so, that is inherently unhealthy. It is a situation ripe for abuse. Most people are decent and maybe wouldn't go there, but there are a whole lot of people out there that this would be a free ticket to manipulate and control their spouse under the guise of following God which horrifies and disgusts me. IF - IF - you believe that somehow the man is in a higher position according to the Bible (which I do not believe nor do the majority of Christians on this planet as far as I am concerned by the way). But if you believe that you HAVE to see the capacity for abuse here. And you really need to PROACTIVELY say something to make people who are in that situation realize - Wait, this doesn't apply to you. You are in a situation where you are being abused. I'm not talking about your situation. But Eggerich doesn't do that. And in fact here, when wives are saying that men are specifically disrespecting their wives by not listening to them, he starts saying maybe you're the problem.

Reminder: She has written in saying that ALL the men in her small group are treating their wives in a condescending way. And his response is: the wives must be contentious. All of them? Really?

Now, I love this next bit:

John Gottman, arguably the most respected marriage researcher around, writes: "In the research literature on marital interaction that has used observational methods, women's marital interaction . . . has been consistently described as more confronting, demanding,

coercive, and highly emotional . . . than the interaction of their husbands." (See John M. Gottman, *What Predicts Divorce: The Relationship between Marital Processes and Marital Outcomes* [Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994], iii.)

I am so glad he brought up John Gottman. What did he call Gottman? "The most respected marriage researcher around." Emmerson obviously thinks Gottman is a good person to go to for marriage advice because he's using Gottman's research to back up his own claim, meaning he trusts Gottman's research. And he's saying that Gottman's research shows that women make marriage worse, right? By being confronting, demanding, coercive, and highly emotional." Wow, Gottman must think women are terrible!

Well, let me give you some Gottman. I'm going to read this, from *7 Principles for Making Marriage Work*, principle 4, on letting your spouse influence you:

"In our long-term study of 130 newlywed couples, whom we followed for nine years, we found that, even in the first few months of marriage, men who allowed their wives to influence them had happier relationships and were less likely to eventually divorce than men who resisted their wives' influence. Statistically speaking, when a man is not willing to share power with his partner there is an 81 percent chance that his marriage will self-destruct. Obviously, it takes two to make or break a marriage, so we're not singling out men here. The point of this chapter is not to scold, bash, or insult either gender. It's certainly just as important for wives to treat their husbands with honor and respect. **But my data indicate that the vast majority of wives—even in unstable marriages—already do that. This doesn't mean that they don't get angry and even contemptuous of their husbands. It just means that they let their husbands influence their decision making by taking their opinions and feelings into account. But too often, men do not return the favor.**"

"But we did find that the happiest, most stable marriages in the long run were those in which the husband did not resist sharing power and decision making with the wife. When the couple disagreed, these husbands actively searched for common ground rather than insisting on getting their way."

"More than 80 percent of the time, it's the wife who brings up sticky marital issues, while the husband tries to avoid discussing them. This isn't a symptom of a troubled marriage—it's true in most happy marriages as well."

He doesn't just talk about allowing the wife to influence--but actually sharing decision-making, equally, which is the opposite of what Eggerichs says. And this is the only chapter in his book where he's talking mostly to one gender, because he says this is a problem that men primarily have. They don't listen to their wives, or they try to dominate their wives.

Gottman is saying that most women already respect men. That's not the problem. And in fact, this was the ONLY chapter that he mostly addressed to one gender--men. Why? **Because the big problem that Gottman sees is that men do not respect women.**

In addition, Sharon Jayson, in USA Today, writes, “Around the house, women rule. And men aren't putting up a fight about it, according to a study from the Pew Research Center that examines how gender and power play out at home and in the community. Of 1,260 individuals surveyed this summer— either married or living together—women wield more decision-making power at home. In 43% of couples, women made more decisions—almost twice as many as men—in the four areas Pew surveyed: planning weekend activities, household finances, major home purchases and TV watching.”

So he is quoting two “experts” out of context here, and what is the impression he’s giving? That women are making all the decisions. That women are running families.

There’s a big difference in decisions about what cereal to buy and whether or not to buy a house, by the way. Women do make most decisions about kids because they are there, with the kids. Most women would love it if their husbands were more involved, and they were a true partnership.

But is this even in line with the question that he was asked? The women are saying that their husbands are being condescending and are not accepting any input. And he’s turning around and saying, “well, actually, women are making all the decisions and emasculating men, so you’re actually wrong. What you think is the problem isn’t the problem at all”

There’s a word for that. It’s called gaslighting. Here is what it means:

“Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation in which a person seeks to sow seeds of doubt in a targeted individual or in members of a targeted group, making them question their own memory, perception, and sanity”

So you may THINK that he is being condescending, but actually, YOU’RE WRONG. Your perception of reality is wrong. More on this in a minute.

You know what he’s not saying? Any statistics at all about emotional abuse. He’s being told a story that sounds like a controlling, potentially abusive situation, and he’s not even mentioning that. Does he not understand how prevalent this is?

Now he’s turning to the women in this small group. Ready?

My question for the women in this small group would be, where do they land? Do their husbands walk on them as doormats in the home, rarely if ever listening to their concerns and making decisions contrary to their wishes? Or do these wives make the majority of the family decisions but are not reporting this because recently their husbands stepped to the plate as an equal due to the Love and Respect equation

and these wives don't like this?

Two options: Either these women are doormats, or they're upset because their husbands are now trying to make some decisions.

Could there be a third option? Say, a healthy marriage option? Where both spouses see each other as true partners and, you know, discuss things together?

I am not suggesting that these women do not feel more vulnerable or victimized. God's Word calls her the weaker vessel, but with that she can overcompensate in confronting and controlling, and not see this but only see her husband pushing back and then interpreting that as Dominating.

So he's saying that the women are interpreting him as being dominating, when all that he is doing is stepping up to his God-given role to be--wait for it--DOMINATING. Because in Eggerichs view of marriage, the husband makes the decisions. The wife must submit to his leadership. Let me give you an example of what she is told to do if she disagrees with something he is doing. (Workaholic). Mention it in a few sentences, quietly, respectfully, then say absolutely nothing else about it for a few weeks. This is how she is to treat him if she thinks he's doing something wrong.

This is also a man who liked to leave wet towels on the bed, and felt that his wife was being disrespectful because she got angry about that. (no more time to put wet towels on the floor, where at least the bedding won't have to be changed).

However, even in the best of situations, inevitably a husband will fail to approach the situation as lovingly as he should. And hopefully, his frame of reference is not to push her way out of the decision-making process but to get a chair for himself at the table. She must be careful to not misinterpret her husband's motives, nor how he is looking at his involvement.

Having said this, a husband can club his wife with the Respect message—I get that, and perhaps that truly is what is going on in this situation.

Nice of him to make this one allowance.

But when I unpack most situations, the men are not trying to dominate to the extent that these wives are interpreting, and when the wives get in tune with the husband's deepest heart, she realizes he is simply taking more initiative to act like a team. The

Love and Respect message has challenged him to be more involved as a man of honor, so he positions himself to give voice to his feelings whereas earlier he remained passive. These wives should not confuse initiation with dominance, nor his former passivity as respecting her as a person.

So the problem here? The wife is simply misinterpreting her husband's actions. He's just trying to step up to the plate, and she's not realizing it.

The entire small group has women who are saying that their husbands are domineering, selfish, and condescending, and he says, "it's simply because you don't understand them and your God-given role."

In other words, women--it's your fault.

In fact, he can say that husbands should listen to their wives all he wants, but the fact of the matter is that the book is systematically set up to make sure that men never have to do so at all.

- His examples of HIS OWN MARRIAGE are about his wife "learning" to "respect" him more by STOPPING asking him to do things (cleaning, etc.)
- He gives multiple examples of how women ask for unrealistic things/are disrespectful when they talk to husbands but no examples of how husbands are wrong for not heeding their wife's warnings
- He is still, in this email, saying that the only time a man should listen to his wife is if she meets qualifications (she's prudent, she's godly, she only does good actions towards him. Well, what if he decides she's not prudent, not godly, or he doesn't see her challenging him and holding him to a higher standard as a "good action" but rather as a negative, nagging one? Emerson is still putting all the power and control in the husband's court because THE HUSBAND DECIDES IF THE WOMAN MEASURES UP. The woman has NO value in and of herself--her opinion can only be listened to "biblically" if she meets a higher standard. However, NO SUCH STANDARD IS GIVEN FOR MEN. Women just have to listen no matter what.
- If a woman was married to an emotionally immature man who couldn't step outside of himself for 5 minutes and ask, "Is she right? Am I being unreasonable?" there is nothing in Eggerichs' book that would make that husband reconsider listening to his wife's thoughts because Emerson gives this man permission to simply disregard his wife by saying she doesn't measure up.

Questions to Consider

1. Emerson wrote, "The Bible challenges a young husband to trust the heart of his wife and to believe that her actions toward him are for good and not for evil." Why do so many husbands not fully trust the hearts of their wives? Why do they have difficulty believing that their intentions are for good and not for evil?

2. Have you ever experienced or seen a situation in which the husband held a condescending attitude toward his prudent and respectful wife? Based on 1 Peter 3:1–2, how do you believe these wives should Respond?

Allow me to read you 1 Peter 3:1-2:

Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, **2** when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

What is Emerson saying here? Are you upset, women? Shut up.

That's what he told his wife when she was telling him to please stop leaving candy wrappers on the floor and stop putting wet towels on the bed.

Be quiet.

Something else: If the only way that a man can feel respected is if his wife never challenges him--what does that say about him?

3. Why do you think that studies have shown that in most marriages, women make the majority of the decisions? In these homes, if the husband were to attempt to step up in his role as leader and make more decisions for them, in what ways can this be misinterpreted by his Wife?

Actually, studies show the opposite. Who says that? Gottman, the one Eggerichs says he trusts.

4. Emerson wrote that a wife should not interpret her husband's former passivity as him respecting her as a person? What do you think that means?

Note how in all of these questions, it's the woman who needs to change her attitude. He never asks a question--men, hey, your wives are feeling like you're acting condescending towards them! No, *it's that if women think there is a problem in their marriage, then the women must be wrong.*

This is gaslighting, which is when we question someone's perceptions to undermine them. Eggerich is coming back to the women and saying, "your husband would definitely listen to you if you were a prudent wife and he isn't listening so therefore you must be complaining." Eggerich assumes that the women are not reliable narrators of their own lives and assumes they are in the wrong.

Women have been saying this to him since he started teaching it. He included it in his book. He's getting people writing to him about it still. We had hundreds of women saying the same thing. And he's still saying: **Women, you're wrong.**

Women, if you are feeling as if you aren't being heard, maybe the problem is that you aren't being heard. Maybe the problem is that your husband is being taught that he doesn't need to listen to you, because you are easily deceived, and you can't be trusted. Maybe your husband is being taught that he's not a real man unless he makes all the decisions. Maybe your husband is being taught that if he's upset about something, the only real reason is that he's being disrespected. Maybe it's because you're wrong.

Imagine you've read this whole letter as a woman whose husband is controlling and emotionally abusive. What do you hear?

Imagine you're a woman who is simply trying to get her husband to stop leaving wet towels on the bed, but he says that when she does this, she's not recognizing his role as leader.

ONE WORD missing from this whole blog post/email. Do you know what it is? Jesus.

So let me give you some Jesus:

They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. (Matthew 23:4)

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **26** Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, (Matthew 20:25-26)

The profound disrespect he shows women is truly astounding.

Women need respect. Men need love. All of us need to act like Christ. Christ needs to be the centre, not the husband. She is not put here to make the husband's life easy. She is put here to have iron sharpen iron. She is not here to enable selfishness. She is here so BOTH can grow.

One last thing: If you are like the letter writer, and you and your spouse attended a Love & Respect event or read the book and got a lot out of it, that's great. It likely means, though, that you are both already godly and mature people. Please realize that you are the exception, not the rule. Don't teach this material. Don't do what this letter writer did and lead a small group. If you teach this stuff to people who are immature, or selfish, or even abusive, you will make their marriages worse because this teaching is wrong. Please don't spread it.

As a church, we must do better than this. We must demand better books than this. We must insist that Jesus always be the center, not the husband, or else we're doing the whole thing wrong. And that's idolatry.

