

The Godly Wife
The Godly Family
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Bible Text: 1 Peter 3:1-6
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Let us read again in 1 Peter 3. We can read together verse 1, "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives." Well, there is a word in that verse that sounds pretty horrific to modern ears, "subjection." Maybe a more modern translation would be "submission." "Wives be in submission to your own husbands." It's a horrific word to modern ears and yet it's a very biblical word. We find it in Ephesians 5, we find it here, we find it in Colossians 3, and we find the same concept referred to twice in the pastoral epistles too. So we can't get away from this word, we can't deny its existence, and we have to receive it, but it's important when we're considering this whole idea of a wife submitting to her husband, that we begin where we began last week. You remember last week we looked at the godly husband and we looked at two things in particular: his Christ-like leadership and his Christ-like love, and that has to be the context, the backdrop, the foundation, the start point for any call to wives to submit. It's not submitting to just any old husband but here what's portrayed as the ideal is this husband that is characterized by Christ-like leadership and Christ-like love. So that's where we begin.

It's also important to begin by confessing because I'm sure we've all been influenced by Hollywood's examples of what it means to be a husband or a wife, and they are far usually from the biblical pattern. But these, the media, films, music, have impacted all of us to one degree or another, maybe not firsthand but even secondhand through others who have been influenced by these things. We also need to confess that this has been abused, this whole idea of a man being the head of his wife and the wife being submissive to her husband, has been abused and men have abused this. I'm sure we all know examples, maybe in our own families, but certainly amongst people we know, where husbands have taken this and crushed their wives with it and they have taken the attitude, "I am therefore superior and she is inferior. I am the boss and she's my slave or servant." And of course, this is so sinful, so wickedly wrong and should be confessed by men who have fallen into this.

So we begin with the biblical foundation of male leadership and male love, we begin by confessing abuse of this truth, but what we don't do is therefore abandon that truth, abandon this role because it's been twisted and perverted and abused. We do not just say,

"Well, we'll just make up one ourselves." No, this is in the Bible and we have to receive it in faith and put it into practice. I want us to try and turn our eyes away today from Hollywood's examples, I want us to turn away from bad examples we have seen or practiced and I want us to turn to heaven's model, heaven's example, because that's, notice, how this chapter begins. It begins with this word, "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands." In other words, it's pointing us to something that has come before and saying, "In this same way." And what we'll notice shortly as we look back at chapter 2 is that we have heaven's example of submission to guide us here.

So let's look, first of all, at three models of submission that we find in the Bible. The first model of submission is the one that was in the chapter we read last week. In Ephesians 5, it speaks of the church's submission to Christ as head and that's a subject all on its own that we could easily spend a sermon on, but I think that's a model that is often preached upon, often spoken about at weddings, the church's submission to Christ and, therefore, I want to look primarily at a second model and it's Christ's submission to his Father and that's the one that's brought before us here by Peter.

I want you to notice here there are three stages in Christ's relationship to his Father. First of all, there is his essential equality with the Father. The eternal Son is eternally equal with his Father. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God equal in power and glory says the Shorter Catechism, and both the Athanasian and the Nicene Creed also emphasize the essential equality of the Father and the Son. They are equal in person-hood, equal in identity, equal in their essence, they are of equal intelligence, virtue, worth. They are equal, there is not a smidgen, there is not a millimeter of difference up or down as these three holy persons are compared one to another. That's brought home to us, of course, in Philippians 2, isn't it, when it speaks of Jesus who thought it not robbery to be equal with God. It wasn't something that he was claiming illegitimately, wrongfully, sinfully. It wasn't something he was stealing, it was something he was entitled to. It was his by right.

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are equal in essence and so are men and women. We mentioned this last week. It isn't that men are essentially superior and women are essentially inferior. No. There is an essential equality, equal in person-hood, equal in identity, equal in essence, of equal value, worth, equal in gifts and grace, equal in their contributions. So that's where we begin and this says, "Likewise," it's looking back as we'll see to the Father's relationship to the Son and he's saying, "Essentially equal."

But there is a second stage in Christ's relationship with his Father and that's what's really spoken of in 1 Peter 2. What's brought before us here is Christ's voluntary, willing and happy acceptance of a servant role for the Father's glory and for the good of sinners. It's interesting the context here. You'll notice, for example, in verse 13 of chapter 2 that we're told to submit to government and it's a bad government. Then in verse 18, servants or employees are told to be subject to their masters. The same idea: submission. And again, what's envisaged is difficult circumstances. It's harsh employment. And then in 1 Peter 3, wives are called to submit to their husbands and, again in this case, it's pagan husbands, the wife being converted, the husband still being a pagan.

So we have three calls to submission here, to the state, to employers, to husbands, and it's submission in these three situations in very difficult circumstances and the example for all this is Christ's submission to his Father in very difficult circumstances. You'll see that, for example, in verse 21 of chapter 2. After speaking of submission to government and speaking of submission to employers, he says, "For even hereunto were ye called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps." And it goes on to speak of the very difficult circumstances in which he served his Father and saved sinners.

So what is this telling us? It's telling us that while still retaining essential equality with his Father, the Son accepted a servant role for a time and for a particular saving purpose and here citizens and employees and wives are told, "Likewise, accept this servant role for a time for the glory of God and for the good of sinners, even if it's in very difficult circumstances." So Christ's submission to his Father, his acceptance of this servant role while still retaining equality with God is our pattern here.

But there is a third stage to this: there is essential equality, then there is taking this servant role, but thirdly, what happened after Christ accomplished this? He was exalted to the highest glory again. Remember in Philippians 2 when it says he took upon himself the form of a servant and suffered unto the death of the cross wherefore God highly exalted him and gave him a name that's above every name, it's saying this temporary role of submission, of serving, is ultimately followed by exaltation back to that heavenly glory, obvious equality in every way with his Father. And that's also women, wives, can look forward to this too. In fact, you know, you might say, surely we can say that the submission and the service of Christ, his accepting of this role for the glory of God and the good of sinners, ultimately makes him all the more glorious in heaven and for all eternity. Perhaps we could also say that this would be true of wives who take this role and who do this for the glory of God and the good of sinners, that they will be rewarded for their temporary, purposeful role in a wonderfully glorious way in heaven.

So here we have Christ's submission to the Father's will as our model for the wife's submission to the husband's will and very briefly, let me just give you a third model here. We've got the church's submission to Christ in Ephesians 5, we have Christ's submission to the Father in 1 Peter 2, but also in this chapter we've got the holy Old Testament woman's submission to their husbands. In verse 5 we're told, "For after this manner," it's the same word as "likewise, "likewise in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands." So he points to Old Testament women in general and says, "Use them as your pattern too." Don't go to modern women for your examples, don't go to celebrities and stars, here the Christian women are pointed backwards to the Old Testament, the holy women of God in general and then specifically to Sara in verse 6, "Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement."

We don't have time to go into explaining these words in particular but let these three patterns deeply impress you. God has not left us short of models, in other words. The

church's submission to Christ, Christ's submission to his Father, the Old Testament women's submission to their husbands, especially Sara to Abraham. These are God's patterns for us and we need to pray that God would drive out of our minds all the patterns and examples that we are bombarded with daily and ask God to show us where we have been influenced wrongly by either our experience or what we see or the culture of our day. Let's resist this cultural pressure. Instead, pray that God would give us this holy pressure, this holy molding into his patterns.

And I think when we do that as well, we won't find anything degrading about these roles. I think that's often what people say, "Well, this degrades women. This brings women down. This crushes women." Well, it may do if wrongly practiced but never if it's well practiced. Can you see that Christ was degraded? He didn't think that. When he came to this earth we're told that he burst forth in praise saying, "I delight to do your will, O my God! Your law is written within my heart." If you read through John's Gospel especially, there's an emphasis there continually, "I have come to do my Father's will. I'm not speaking my words but his. My meat and drink is to do the Father's will. Not my will but your will be done." On and on he goes. It's just he views this as a privilege, as a pleasure, and as a great part of God's great purpose. So if you are ever tempted to think this is degrading, think of Christ's delight in this servant role. Surely, in fact we can use it positively, to think, "Well, I've been given a role in which I am specifically called to model the submission of Christ to his Father's will."

So these are three models of submission. I want to briefly touch on four parts of submission or four characteristics of submission. First of all, there is this word "obedience." Again, just sets so many people off in anger and bad temper, rebellion. Obedience. Well, again, if you look in Ephesians 5, you look at Colossians 3, you look here, that's what's there. It's in black and white. We see it, for example, in verse 6, "Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord." Now, what does it mean to obey? It means to accept your husband's leadership. It means to acknowledge it verbally, totally with body language too. It means to welcome that husband's headship; to be grateful for it. It means to encourage it, to call your husband to leadership and to praise him when he leads. And of course, it means to follow as long as it's not into sin. That can never be the meaning of this.

So there's obedience, secondly, there is chaste conduct. Verse 2, "While they behold your chaste conversation," or lifestyle. He's saying, "Don't give your husband any reason to doubt your faithfulness to him, your loyalty to him in thought, in word or in action."

Then, thirdly, there's respect. "While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear," it literally means reverence or respect and it's calling women to show respect and that, of course, starts with an inward disposition that there is a respectful attitude in the heart, but it also results in words about him to friends, family, colleagues, and words to him, that they too should be respectful.

Then, fourthly, there is inward beauty. "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it

be the hidden man," or the hidden person, "of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit." It's not banning, of course, women wearing attractive clothes or even jewelry, but it's comparing two things: it's saying over here is the issue of clothing and of jewelry and adornment and make-up, and over here there is the inward characteristics of meekness and a quiet spirit. You see, when you compare these two scales, these two areas in the scales, this one should be so much heavier. This one should be so much weightier. And of course, this was not what was happening in these days. Remember when we looked at 1 Timothy, we noted how the culture of these days, the women had the most incredible structures of hair, incredibly extravagant and showy clothing and all kinds of bizarre make-up. It was very attention seeking and distracting, especially in the worship of God. And yet it's very tempting that for a woman, again, you see in the world this is what worldly women do and worldly women attract all kinds of handsome and desirable men. So there is this very obvious pressure to be pulled in this direction, to prioritize the outward appearance and yet part of being a wife is prioritizing the inward, adorning the inward, as it is described here, the ornament, the attractive jewelry, you might say, of a meek and a quiet spirit, focusing on what is largely hidden to most but not to your husband as we'll see.

This is what makes godly men feel good about their wives, not their outward appearance, although it's not unimportant, but their inward character. This is what a godly young man is or should be looking for in a perspective wife. This young woman is what you should be focused on, not the latest fashions, hairstyles, and so on, but focused on how I can grow in meekness, how I can grow in a quiet spirit, in a humble, submissive spirit.

Now, I want to give you an example of how this works. I think it's very easy, in a way, to talk about this on a conceptual level, a theoretical level. I want to take a few minutes to just show how this actually works out in practice. I want to show in ten steps what it means in a specific situation for a wife to submit to her husband.

Let's just think, for example, of wanting to buy a new house or maybe a new car or something like that, but let's just stick with house at the moment. This begins, first of all, with the husband's initiative. Initiative. That's involved in leadership. The husband comes home and he says to his wife, "I think we should move. I think we should buy a new house." And notice first of all this, "I think." It's not, "We will." That's not where he begins. His initiative opens a conversation. "I think we should move." So it begins with the husband's initiative.

Secondly, it moves on to explanation. The next thing he says is, "And here are my reasons." He's not just coming home and saying, "We're moving. End of story." No, he has a duty to explain why, what's the purpose, what's the aims, what's the pros, what's the cons. Explanation. "Here are my reasons." He respects his wife. He respects her intelligence and honors her by explaining himself.

Thirdly, there is invitation. The husband then invites his wife's opinion. Again, it's not just, "We're doing this. Here's why. I don't want to hear anything you're saying." No, the

next thing he says after saying, "Here are my reasons," is, "What do you think? What's your opinion?"

And the next step, fourthly, is gratitude. So the wife is being invited for her opinion and she should express gratitude. "My dear husband, I acknowledge your leadership in general, I appreciate the initiative you're taking, I'm thankful that you're thinking about our family and its needs and I appreciate this thoughtful initiative." So just laying out the general principle of, "I'm generally submissive and generally welcome of your leadership in general."

Then there's listening as the wife then goes on to give her reasons why or why not. The husband has to listen to this. It's not just he's going through the motions, "Okay," rant on a bit and then, "We'll just do it anyway." No, he's really to listen rationally, reasonably as she expresses her agreement or disagreement. As she says, "Yeah, there are good things but there are some bad things here as well. Have you thought about this? Or have you considered that?" Now, obviously if there's agreement, then it's fairly straightforward and the process is over but let's just move into a more difficult situation where the husband has given his reasons, he's invited his wife's opinion, she's expressed gratitude for his leadership in general, but when she starts explaining her thoughts, she's resistant, she disagrees. She doesn't see this move as necessary, helpful or wise.

Well, that brings us, sixthly, to persuasion. After the husband has listened to the wife's reasons, he patiently tries to persuade her. He doesn't just say, "Well, that's your opinion. I'm the boss. Off we go. I've given you your say but this is my say and this is what..." No, he doesn't. He must try to persuade. He must try to bring her on board. He must try to answer her objections. He must try to help her see things from his perspective as well.

So there is patience, there is interaction, and a thing like a house, obviously it should take days, maybe weeks, maybe months. This shouldn't just be, "Well, I've given you a day to think about it. So you're not in agreement, we're going ahead and doing it anyway." No. There has to be patience and maybe some compromise as well. "Okay, maybe my idea of moving here or buying this house, okay, I take your point. Maybe we should then go somewhere in between." But it's a process of persuasion or of negotiation.

And then patience, waiting, waiting, waiting. Appropriate lengths of time dependent on the size of the decision. Number 7: patience. Prayer going on during that time. Further discussion. Further attempts at compromise.

But then, eighthly, decision. The husband has to make a decision. He's given his reasons, he's invited his wife's opinion, he's listened reasonably, he's interacted with her, he's tried to persuade, he's tried to compromise, he's prayed, maybe counsel from outside as well has been sought, but ultimately the husband has to make the decision. After weighing everything up, as long as it's not a sinful matter and as long as no compromise has been possible, if the husband is still persuaded that this is God's will, then he has to decide and the wife has to accept. That's what submission means. That's what obedience means and the wife should accept this and cooperate with it.

That brings us to the ninth point: support. So the husband has decided, the wife has accepted but now she has to support. It mustn't just be, "I'm going along with this with gritted teeth. I'm going to try and make this as hard as possible. I'm going to sulk and go in a mood about this. I'm going to make it as painful as I possibly can for him." No, submission means willing, glad, acceptance. Of course that's hard, but to pray over that and pray for God's help, say, "Well, I respect your judgment, I trust your leadership, I don't agree with it, I don't see it myself but you are my head. I know you are leading as Christ leads his church. I know you're trying to love me as Christ loved his church so I'm going to go along with this."

Then, tenthly, review. A decision has been taken, the house has been bought, the family's been moved and some months or weeks later, then there should be a review of this. Well, if it's turned out well, the wife should gladly say, "Well, my dear husband, you were right. This has worked out so well for us. Thank you for leading us in this way. Your judgment has been proven right yet again." But if it's not turned out well, if it's clearly been the wrong decision, then the husband should come along and confess, "Well, I got that one wrong. I did it in good faith. I tried to seek the Lord's will. I tried to listen to you and clearly I got this wrong. I'm not infallible and I'm sorry." A wife shouldn't be demanding of this kind of apology but the husband should very gladly and willingly give it.

These I would say are ten steps. Now, there are lots of different situations and it's not always neat and tidy like this but I think if we use that as a sort of grid, a schematic of how this should go ahead, I think we can adjust it to all sorts of different situations. Initiative, explanation, invitation, gratitude, listening, persuasion, patience, decision, support and review.

Let me just give a couple of qualifying remarks to this. First of all, this is in the context, remember, of Christ-like leadership and Christ-like love.

Secondly, the wife can also take initiative. The wife can come to the husband and say, "Dear, do you think we should consider moving? At any point, I'd like you to think about that." It's not in a demanding role or attitude but that's, again, a submissive initiative. It's very acceptable.

Also, the husband should pay very close attention to areas in which the wife is an expert. The husband's got to recognize he doesn't know everything about everything and there are certain areas, especially maybe in the raising of children or maybe she's especially good with finances, where he should give extra-special care to listen to her reasoning and her expertise.

Also, the husband can delegate decisions. He can say, "Well, regarding this, over to you. I'm giving you authority to make the right decision in this area." Obviously in huge big decisions, that would be an abdication, but in certain areas the husband should feel free to delegate to his wife certain responsibilities.

And if the husband is being unreasonable and impractical and oppressive, then here's the pattern for how to change him. It's not in resistance and rebellion but here. Again, it points us back to this meek and quiet spirit and it holds out the possibility that the husband may be won, he may be persuaded and not just on temporary matters but on eternal and spiritual matters. He hasn't been won by her words but Peter says he can be won by your life, by your spirit, by your meekness.

And also this calls us, the wives, to submission and trusting in God. You notice here in verse 6 it speaks of Sara obeying, "whose daughters you are as long as you do well and are not afraid with any amazement." It's calling women, just keep doing good and don't be terrified. Don't kind of say, "This guy's a disaster. He's leading us in totally the wrong ways. We're doomed." No, trust the Lord. It's saying don't be afraid with terror. You do the right thing, trust the Lord, you do what's here and the Lord will look after you.

Now, if the husband is continually overruling the wife, there's something wrong. If this process goes through and all the time it comes to number 8, decision time and the husband's always going against his wife, husbands, there's something wrong most likely with your leadership and your love.

But also, if the husband is never overruling his wife, has never done that on any occasion, there is something wrong there too and it looks very much like the wife is in charge of the husband. And that might not be a very domineering tyrannical sort of woman, no, it can be a very passively aggressive woman, a very manipulative woman, someone who is very expert at getting her way while showing a very submissive spirit. We've got to be careful of this insidious and deceitful way that the devil creates rebelliousness in all of us.

Let's finish up by looking at two attractions of submission. We've seen three models of submission, we've seen four parts of submission, we've seen ten steps of submission, lastly, two attractions just very briefly.

It's attractive to God. You'll notice here it says in verse 4 about the submissive woman showing these marks of submission, in the sight of God, it's of great price, inestimable value. Yes, your colleagues, your neighbors, your family may look at you, wives, and say you are mad. This is crazy. This is awful. But God looks at it and says, gold. Priceless. I love it. It's attractive to me.

But there's also, as we've seen, beautiful to men, to even heathen men as here. Won, not so much through the ear what she's saying to him, but through the eye, how she's behaving in relationship to him. He's saying if you're married to a pagan man, an unbelieving man, an ungodly man, here's the best evangelism you can do, the most powerful evangelistic tool. It goes against all our reason but this is God's word and it says this is the way to do it: a submissive spirit. Don't leave him. Don't ignore him. Don't give up on him. Don't nag him. Submit to him insofar as it doesn't involve sin, that they may be won by, it says conversation, but the word actually means lifestyle. It's the opposite, really, of word.

Notice from last week and this week, Paul and Peter, what is their emphasis? It's not on rights, it's on responsibilities. It's not so much, "Hey, you should be doing this for me." No, it's, "What can I do for you?" We've got to believe. It takes faith. We've got to believe that this way is the happiest way to live. This is God's order for human happiness, for a happy family.

There may be this morning that maybe especially some of the women are sitting here thinking, "Well, I have not done this. I have failed." And you have, just as the men are not perfect leaders or perfect lovers. Sure, wives are not perfect submitters but what do we do when we feel convicted like this about our unsubmitiveness? Well, that's where we're pointed yet again, back to Christ and his submissiveness. Our unsubmission is covered by his submission. Our rebelliousness is covered by his perfect obedience and service. We bring all our failings to him as Peter points us to here, and we see the perfection of how he submitted to and obeyed the Father's will in the worst circumstances possible and did it perfectly not just outwardly but inwardly too. And we are brought, surely, not just to worship in wonder, also to trust in faith. For every fault we have, he has a virtue that covers it perfectly. Maybe look to Christ, then, not just as a model but also as a Savior. Amen.

Let's pray.