

# Indicatives & Imperatives in the Household, 1

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*Ephesians*

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 5:22-24  
**Preached on:** Sunday, November 18, 2018

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Let us tonight return to the book of Ephesians 5 as we continue our study in this letter of Paul to the church at Ephesus, and our text tonight that we have come to transitioning into a new section, is Ephesians 5:22-24. This will be the start of our journey through some very important passages concerning the household. Our text again is chapter 5, verses 22 to 24, however I will be reading from verses 22 all the way to verse 33.

Let us hear God's word tonight from Ephesians 5:22,

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Thus ends the reading of God's word.

Let's pray.

*Our Father in heaven, we are grateful to you that you have revealed unto us that marriage is not a part of man's ingenuity or man's reasoning but is a union that was created in your own mind, an institution that you, yourself, have instituted and you,*

*yourself, have wired. Father, we pray this night that you would help us to understand your word and may you apply it to our hearts. Give us proper understanding and even proper categories in which to think about these most important matters. Father, above all we pray that you would grant us faithfulness in the roles and duties you've called us to and, Father, I pray you would give your servant unction this night and strength to speak your word to your people. May we all receive it by faith. We pray all this in the name of our Lord Jesus with dependence upon your Spirit tonight. Amen.*

You may be seated.

In our last message in Ephesians 5, we found that verse 21 of Ephesians 5 served as a kind of hinge verse or a transition verse, it could be called a bridge verse, when it says in verse 21, "submitting to one another in the fear of God." Now this serves as a bridge by doing two things, if you recall. On the one side of the bridge, this verse is one of those participles that describes what it means to be Spirit-filled; it's one of the results of being Spirit-filled. A word-filled, Spirit-filled person is one who will exercise proper biblical submission in divinely-ordered relationships. On the other side of the bridge, verse 21 introduces the subject of submission within divinely-ordered relationships that now Paul is going to take up in this next section of the letter.

So in this sense, verse 21 is a bridge and as we considered last time at length, one of the keys to properly approaching the whole subject matter of submission so as to preserve the dignity of the parties in that relationship is to understand their divinely-ordered nature. While both parties are ontologically identical, meaning that in their beings the husband and the wife, that's just one example, there is master/servant, child/parent, but in these divinely-ordered relationships you have both parties that are in their beings identical, ontologically speaking, but yet economically they are distinguished, economically being the functions and roles that they participate in in that divinely-ordered relationship there is a distinguished economically according to the way that God has ordered and created that particular relationship.

He has wired such relationships in such a way to include a submitting party on the one hand and a party to whom submission is rendered on the other hand. This next section that we are now entering into, Paul goes full-throttle into what is known as the household codes. Here in the apostle, as he does in other letters if you're familiar with the Pauline letters, he does this in many of the letters that he writes and he addresses what it looks like to practice godliness in these divinely-ordered relationships within the household, and in each of these we find a submitting party and a party to whom submission is rendered. He begins with wives, as we saw at the beginning of our reading this evening, he then is going to move to husbands, and then to children, and then to bondservants, and then to masters. We're going to be considering each of these relationships. The first divinely-ordered relationship obviously that Paul deals with is marriage, the marriage relationship. So naturally, he will address this relationship of husband and wife before moving on to address the product of that relationship which is a child, and that's why the child then comes next quite naturally.

Now there is a subject that's introduced in our text this evening that serves as an excellent starting point for entering into this whole discussion of the marriage relationship and this requires us to make a distinction between indicative statements and imperative statements. Now we have in Sunday School classes and in other settings, we have made this distinction and it's important that we revisit that tonight to make sure that we understand the difference in these two kinds of statements. Now you probably from the outset know what an imperative statement is, even going back to our early childhood learning, we know that an imperative statement is simply a statement of command, it's a statement of instruction, but the indicative statement might not be quite as familiar to us but an indicative statement is simply a statement wherein you have a statement of fact. To give an example, we might say that the table is painted red. That is simply an indicative statement, it's a statement of fact about the table. But if you were to say paint that table red, you now have made an imperative statement, there is an instruction or command that's being given.

It's very important to distinguish between indicative and imperative. Now in that light, let us look again at our text this evening as it began. Ephesians 5:22 begins with "Wives, submit to your own husbands." I hope that you notice from the outset where Paul starts. He has started with an imperative statement. He is saying to the wife what the wife is to do. He is instructing and commanding with the authority that the Lord has given him, he is instructing the woman what she is to do in her relationship with her husband. It's an imperative statement. But now notice that Paul is going to do something here, he's going to shift the attention of his reader because look at verse 23, he says here in verse 23, "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is Savior of the body." Do you notice what's happened here? This is, again, why I wanted us to start with definitions, the distinction between an imperative and indicative, because that's exactly what Paul has just done here on the subject of marriage. Paul has turned our attention from an imperative, telling the wife what she is to do, and he is actually going to root that imperative in an indicative because notice that he says here, he says that the husband is the head of the wife. He is not saying that the husband is to strive to be a head. He's not telling the husband that, "You need to try to be a head." He's not telling the husband an imperative, "Now go out and be a head." He's making an indicative statement saying that that is what he is, period. Paul does not state an instruction or a command to the husband here regarding what he is required to do in the relationship. Now that does come next where he says, of course, when he addresses the husband, "Husbands, love your wives." He now shifts to an imperative but in this instruction to the wife, this imperative to the wife, he is rooting that imperative in an indicative stating what the husband is.

Again, we see here the important of the distinction that needs to be made in the marriage relationship. A distinction must be made between what a husband is indicatively and what a husband does imperatively, just as it is important to distinguish what a wife is indicatively and what a wife must do imperatively. Very very important categories and we find Paul, the apostle, using these very categories when he approaches the subject of marriage. In other words, we must distinguish between role, on the one hand, and duty, on the other hand. Role is an indicative matter. Role addresses a person as who they are

in the relationship, not what they are supposed to do in the relationship. Role is dealing with the station that he holds, the station that she holds in the relationship. That is one category in and of itself and must be distinguished because on the other hand when you shift to duty, you now have entered an imperative category, you now have entered into the duties that address the husband in what he is to do in that relationship with the wife, and there's an address to the wife in what she is to do in relation to her husband, the instructions that are given.

Now brothers and sisters, I just want for us to pause a moment because it is important that we pause. Believe me that it is this precise point that some of the most fundamental errors are made in the hearts of Christian husbands and Christian wives. It is precisely at this point that many marriage books and marriage seminars make a most fundamental error that unfortunately leads many new couples in a wrong direction from the very beginning of their marriage in thinking about marriage. What usually is the topic of discussion that begins the conversation about marriage? What usually is the focus of attention, if not given exclusive attention when the subject of marriage arises? The answer is duties. Most people when they think about this discussion start in the wrong place. They start with duties, "What am I supposed to do in the marriage? What's required of me in this marriage? What are my responsibilities to my spouse?" There's a natural impulse, I think, to jump into the matter of duty before ever distinguishing it from the matter of role, yet what gives definition to duty is role, what defines duty is role, what gives rise to imperatives are the indicatives.

Notice that Paul gives us an imperative from the outset to the wife, and what is that imperative? It's very plain, he says submission, "Wives, submit to your own husbands," but the reasoning of that imperative, the rationale for that imperative that he gives to her is, "For," verse 23, for the husband is something. The husband is something, so you see, what's going to define and give shape to this imperative to the wife to submit he gives us, for the husband is something. There is an indicative about him that has very much to do with the imperative that is given. In the apostle's mind, you see, what gave rise to the imperative is that it stems from and is contingent upon this indicative related to the husband.

I cannot stress to us enough how important this distinction is for having a healthy understanding of marriage and having a biblical understanding of marriage. It is not a last item topic in the discussion of marriage, it's a first item topic in the subject of marriage and we find this even in the Apostle Paul's mind who was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Brothers and sisters, in many many marriages there are manifold problems within the relationship that can actually be simply traced back to a particular root and that is a failure to distinguish role from duty. Many many problems in marriages stem from this very simple distinguishing role from duty and failing to do so. Duties arise from roles, roles do not arise from duties. Very fundamental but yet very profound distinction whenever we are approaching the subject of marriages and I feel that there are many entwined problems within marriages that could be solved, at least have a start at being resolved by coming back to this very fundamental distinction between role and duty.

Now notice where Paul does bring us next in verse 25, if you will look over at verse 25 of chapter 5, he says, "Husbands, love your wives." Now do you see what's happened here? After having established the role of the husband in verse 23, saying what he is, you are a head, he then proceeds into the husband's duty. Did you notice that? He doesn't even move into the duty of the husband to love his wife and all the duties that are attached to that, only after establishing his role, something that he is as an indicative. That duty is ultimately grounded in his role.

The unique roles of each of these, and we will, we will be dealing with the wife's role and the wife's duty, and we'll be dealing with the husband's role and the husband's duty, both indicative and imperative, that's the reason why we have Part 1 listed as the title to our message tonight, there's much more to come, but you know, I'd like for us to step back a minute here and before considering the unique roles of husband and wife that they possess in the marriage relationship, I want us to step back a minute to consider a role, an indicative, that both the husband and the wife possess in this relationship, and I will tell you that focusing attention on this matter tonight arises from my own experience as a pastor. I think it's very important for us to capture something here about roles that both the husband and the wife possess and this needs to be digested tonight. Where this is going to bring us in terms of an indicative for them both is back to Ephesians 1:1.

Flip back for a moment, Ephesians 1:1, and we're going to find something here that Paul says that each of them are, an indicative. Chapter 1, verse 1, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus." This entire letter is addressed to saints, so what I'm having us do here is step back a moment to recognize that the husband/wife relationship in the Christian household that he's addressing here, are Christian men and women who are in relationship with one another. That's why when he gets to children, he's going to address the children as ones who have roles and duties within the household that is a Christian household, because what does he say to the children? "Obey your parents." How? "In the Lord." He has a Christian family particularly in mind as he addresses the subject of household, and when he's addressing the subject of marriage, he has particularly in mind saints, a Christian man and a Christian woman in a Christian marriage.

Note here that he is addressing them, in other words, as alive in the Lord Jesus Christ with the presence of the Holy Spirit in each of their hearts enabling them to fulfill – watch this – the first and foremost duty that they both have. And what is that? What's the greatest commandment that God issues forth? Well, this question is answered by our Lord Jesus Christ who provides what is the greatest commandment which he gives us in summary fashion saying, what? "You should love the Lord your God with all your being and love your neighbor as yourself." Fundamental duties that are given to both, each the husband and the wife in this particular case.

Now in the same Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proceeds to provide us a definition of one's neighbor. Do you remember in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, "You've heard it said that you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemies, but I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." So what Jesus does in this important

passage in the Sermon on the Mount is he identifies who your neighbor is, your neighbor is everybody, and he says, "Do you know what? Even your enemy is your neighbor." So when it comes to this matter of loving your neighbor, that includes all persons.

Here we're reminded of the biblical definition of love. We've talked about this in relation to the Shema several Sundays as we went through some passages in Deuteronomy and what did we find about the way that love is defined in Scripture? It's primarily defined by an act and not by a state. It's not a state of feeling and warm affections so when Jesus says that you are to love your neighbor, even your enemies, he's not saying, "Man, you've got to have some warm affections for your neighbor." No, that's not what he's saying. He's not saying, your enemy, you've got to have this warm affection for. No, again, we have to approach this from a biblical understanding of the definition of love. It is an act towards one's neighbor. We are to use our energy and resources in a way that favors our neighbor and benefits our neighbor. We're to love one's neighbor, to act toward him or her with consideration, with actions of kindness and gentleness, with efforts of generosity towards even our enemy because they are our neighbor as well.

Now when you talk about the two tables, as it's been come to be known, I put that in quotes, the "two tables" of the law, we often think of commandments 1 through 4 of the Decalogue on one side that deals with a God-ward orientation, our duties unto God, and then you deal with laws number 5 through 10 that deal with your duties towards your neighbor. What is that? Love of God on the one hand, love of neighbor on the other, and what do we find is the very first item on the second table? Commandment 5. Who is it addressed to? It's addressed to kids and it says, "Children, honor your father and your mother." Now think about it, the second table has to do with love of neighbor. What is that saying to children? Who is their chief neighbor in their life? Their chief neighbor is their momma and their daddy.

You see, this is why it's important for parents to instill in their children at a very early age that their chief neighbor is their parents and their calling in life as a child, one of their primary callings by God in their life is to honor their momma and their daddy because, why? Their mom and their daddy are their chief neighbor, indeed, it's the very first commandment in the second table, but what happens when that little boy or that little girl grows up and gets married? It brings us into another biblical category, doesn't it? "For the man shall leave father and mother," that he has that duty as chief neighbor to, "and cleave unto," whom? Another chief neighbor. You see, as a child your chief neighbor is momma and daddy but when that child leaves father and mother and now there's a special divinely-ordered relationship called marriage that he or she enters into, she or he now has a new chief neighbor and that chief neighbor is the husband to the wife, and the wife to the husband. Do you see that?

Brothers and sisters, one of the starting points of the discussion of Christian marriage in terms of role and duty is this: both of you possess the role of a child of God with the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the law of God, that both of you have the duty to render love to one another. The starting point of the discussion of role and duty when it comes to the matter of marriage, before you get into the details of the indicatives and imperatives

of the husband and the details of the indicatives and imperatives of wife, is to step back and establish the most foundational role and duty that you have to one another is that you love one another as chief neighbor. In marriage counseling, one of the very first matters addressed is this matter, that, yes, we're going to delve into all kinds of details of roles and duties for you, husband, and all kinds of roles and duties for you, wife, but let's start from the foundation: you are her chief neighbor and you are his chief neighbor, and you, under God, your duty is to love one another.

Now wait a second, is that affectionate love? You see, you don't want to get outside the category that is biblical which is action. The husband is to render to the wife and the wife to render to the husband where their energy and their resources are put towards the favor and the benefit of their chief neighbor. They're to deal with one another with consideration, with actions of kindness and generosity, gentleness. Why? Because that person's your chief neighbor and under God you have a duty to that chief neighbor.

Again, brethren, there are many marriages that have manifold problems and issues that if you were to trace it back to where the problem started, in many cases you will land at this most fundamental distinction between indicative and imperative, that on the one hand we have unique duties and roles, but at a very basic level, your wife is your chief neighbor. What are you doing about that? Your husband is your chief neighbor. How is that looking? And it is fundamental, foundational, and many problems in marriage arise from a failure to recognize that chief duty to your chief neighbor.

Yes, there is the duty to love one another but wait a second, what about the first table? There's a duty to love one's neighbor but what is the chief duty? Love of God. You see, this gets back to the very basics, does it not, the fundamentals? What is it that God commands us to do as his people? Love God and love neighbor. We've talked about loving our chief neighbor but have you ever thought about this, that the welfare and the health of your marriage has very much to do with this relationship, love of God? Devotion to God as a child of God?

I know that there is a sentiment and we'll delve into this more, I know that there is the sentiment that, "We were made for each other." You know, we say that with big smiles and with real warm, warm feelings that we were made for each other. Acknowledging that is a legitimate sentiment. We do need to remember that there are three parties in every marriage, not two. We are much like ticks. I know it sounds like a grotesque illustration but bear with me. We are much like ticks. You know, a tick was never designed to find its fulfillment, to find its nourishment, to find its sustenance by latching on to another tick. The two maintain their health and their welfare by being attached to the same host and so long as both are attached to the same host, finding their essential sustenance, their essential relationship, their essential health in Christ Jesus, the third party in the marriage, guess what happens? The relationship they have to one another becomes quite healthy and it functions much like it's supposed to function because they never were intended to find their essential health and their essential sustenance from each other. Oh, there are many marriages that are struggling because they're trying to find in each other what God never intended for them to find in one another, but as they latch

onto Christ and latch onto the host, they find that they love one another as they ought and they live in relationship with one another as God intended them to.

Well, thanks be to God that through Jesus Christ God's action of love, John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he had warm feelings." No, God so loved the world that he took action. He gave his Son. He gave his Son and, brothers and sisters, in Jesus Christ as Christians, especially in these marriage relationships, he has given us the Holy Spirit so that we might actually be able to fulfill these very basic commandments of God, even the great commandment of loving God and loving our chief neighbor. May our marriages be Gospel-centered, God-centered, and driven by grace as we know that we individually are recipients of grace.

Let's pray.

*Our great God and Father, we thank you for this most glorious and beautiful institution that you came up with and that you have chosen to gift. Father, forgive us for trying to rely on our own thinking and our own rationales as to what this institution ought to look like and how it's wired. Father, we thank you for giving us in your word at least some insight into how you've wired this institution that you've created. Forgive us for going against the grain of how you ordered it. We know we've gotten ourselves into all kinds of trouble whenever we think that we know how it is best ordered instead of following what you have provided us in your word. Lord, give us, all of us submission to your word in this important matter of marriage and the roles and duties therein. We submit ourselves to you, Lord, and we ask for your grace to give us insight and to also give us the power by your Holy Spirit to live out that which you call us to. We pray all of this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*