

Marriage According to its Design - Part 1

Well, we have now come to the place in the book of Ephesians where Paul now works through how the gospel applies to our social relationships. And he begins with the most important human relationship that we can experience, this side of glory and that is the marriage relationship. What we have in Ephesians is the longest section on marriage in the New Testament. Paul teaches on the biblical roles of both a husband and a wife and further he develops a distinctly Christian worldview on what marriage is in its very essence.

Every time I have the privilege of overseeing and officiating a wedding, this is the main passage that I bring out. Because the reality is, if we are going to engage this very sacred relationship with faithfulness, if we are going to walk this out in a way that please God, we have to understand what this institution is and what our respective roles are within it. Marriage is not something that we can just figure out on our own. No, marriage is God's creation, it is not a human invention of pragmatism. God has designed it to operate and to function a certain way, for a purpose. And in that, He has given instruction on what this is supposed to look like.

The reality is we are not wholeheartedly shifting subjects here. We have to keep the context of where we have been in mind. Paul is not leaving behind everything that we have just walked through and is saying, "Ok let's talk about something new now, let's talk about marriage." No, that is not at all what is going on. This all flows together.

Remember this entire section is an expounding on what he said in verse 21 that we are to be "submitting to one another in the fear of Christ." That was a header verse from which Paul goes on to give examples of what he is talking about, with husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves. All of which we will get to.

But even beyond that, we have to remember that that verse is connected to what it means to "be filled with the Spirit" in verse 18. So, what we are seeing throughout this entire section is the results of being a transformed believer filled with the Spirit of God. But even beyond that, that verse ties back to verse 15 where he says, "Look carefully then how you walk," speaking of the intentionality with which we are to engage the Christian life. And all of this goes back to the beginning of chapter four, where Paul begins the practical section and says, "In light of all of these gospel truths in the first 3 chapters, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling." Worthy of the calling to be a Christian.

What is the point? What am I getting at? What I am I wanting us to see here is the inescapable fact that the way we conduct our marriages, the way we live out our roles as husband or wife are not a side issue in the Christian faith. This is a direct application of what it means to walk worthy of our callings, to live with intentionality as believers, and to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

So, We cannot see this as a marriage seminar. Tips that you can get for a better marriage. No, this is Christian living. This is first and foremost to be seen as part of our fidelity and obedience to God. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the truth of our profession is most clearly seen in how we carry out our Christian duty in the home. I mean if you are all religious talk, smiles, and kindness when you are at church and around other believers but then you are a terror to your wife or a terror to your husband, or

a terror to your children or to your parents, then in what sense are you really living out the Christian life? In what sense is your life really evidencing a transformation? The Christian life is not summed up in putting on a show around the right people. There is only One who is your Judge, and he sees behind those closed doors. He knows what is going on in the heart.

So, if we are going to profess Christ as Lord, His Lordship must extend to how we conduct ourselves in our homes; how we live out our marriages. And the truth is, this is an area that Satan loves to attack. To try to cause division in the home. Because he knows if your home is messed up everything is messed up. For this reason, one commentator noted that he did not believe it to be an accident that immediately following this section on the household code, Paul goes into teaching on the need to engage in Spiritual warfare. Because Satan loves to attack the family—specifically, marriages—not only on an individual level but also on a cultural level.

I think it goes without saying that, at least in the history of our culture and country there has never been a greater need to understand what God says about marriage than there is right now. And the reason for that is because there exists right now a systematic plan and attack on the creational norm that is the marriage relationship. And it is not just from one small segment of our society. There are multiple cultural streams and agendas feeding into this, whether it be feminism, sexual liberation, so-called gay rights, even Marxism and communism. All of these agendas see and understand that the largest threat to achieving their purposes are the biblical and traditional values of the family unit.

And that is why, as culture has degraded over the years, it is no coincidence that has coincided with degradation of marriage. Why? because they know that the family unit is the backbone of a healthy society, and marriage is the backbone of the family.

So, we have to get this. We have to understand that any aversion we may feel to what the Bible says about marriage does not come from wisdom; it does not come from discernment; it does not come from the Bible. It comes from living in a society that has done everything it can to twist, distort, pervert, and mar the beautiful purposes of God in His designing of marriage.

Now with all that being said, I realize that there are many in here who are not married, and you may be wondering whether or not you even want to listen for the next couple of weeks as the direct applications may not seem to apply to you. Well very quickly let me give you three reasons why singles should be listening to what the Bible says on this topic.

First and foremost, because there actually is direct application to you. What we are going to see as we get into this is that the marriage relationship is a picture of the covenant relationship between Christ and His Bride. So as you learn more about God's design for marriage you gain more understanding of the relationship between Christ and the church, of which you are apart.

Number two, you may well be married someday. Now I realize there are those who have the gift of singleness as Paul laid out in first Corinthians 7 and you use that gift to serve the Lord in a more concentrated manner. And that is wonderful. But that is a minority of people. The majority of you either are or will be married and you need to understand, if you are going to enter this covenant relationship, what exactly you are getting into.

And the third reason, is we are called to bear one another's burdens. You will likely find yourself at some point consoling or counseling someone who is struggling in their marriage. And if you do not want to

lead someone into disobedience, or make their situation worse, you better make sure your advice or counsel comes from the Scripture, and not from the world or merely from empathy. We have to understand these things.

With all that being said, I realize that is a bit of an extended introduction, but I thought it important to set the stage for the next couple of weeks. We don't get to talk about these subjects all that frequently, yet we are living them out daily. So, this is important. And Today Paul begins with an address to wives. And he is unashamedly going straight for the dreaded subject of submission. In fact, what we will see as we look at this text is that Paul gives us three different aspects of a wife's submission: The nature of her submission; The ground or reason for a wife's submission; and the extent of the wife's submission.

And the thing I want us to see and attempt to recover, is the beauty of what God has called wives to do in this act of submitting to their husbands. This is not meant to be merely a burden to bear, but a blessing upon the entire marriage relationship. We know that because of Christ, none of what he calls us to do, none of His commands are burdensome. We have the power of the holy Spirit within us, and all of His commands, including submission, are an opportunity to serve Him and to glorify Him with our lives.

So, let's look at this starting with the nature of a wife's submission. Look at verse 22: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." Now there are a few things I want us to look at here in this short admonition. The first thing we need to ask here is obviously, what does submission mean? We touched on this a little last week, but if we are going to understand this imperative, we have to understand what is being said.

The word in question that is translated *submit* or *be subject to* (depending on your translations), is the Greek word *hupotasso*, which means to subject oneself under or to be subordinate. It is always used in the context of authority or implied authority. In fact, this was a very common military term of the day. Within the military you have rank, order, and authority and this Greek word *hupotasso* was used to speak of the submission within a military unit to those who were over you in authority.

And the fact is, God has created all of creation with rank, order, and authority. Creation was not created in such a way as to be a free-for-all. There is order to it. All of us have authority placed in our lives. Whether it be governmental authority, ecclesiastical authority (church authority), social authority such as employers, and even familial authority. Even beyond that, even in the unseen realm among the spiritual beings there is order and authority. And the Bible makes it quite clear in Romans 13 that all authority is from God. Now there is illegitimate authority in this world such as cult leaders and usurpers and that type of thing. But all true authority is from God. God is a God of order and authority.

So, when we come to the household and see that wives have been commanded by the Scriptures to submit to their husbands, we know that wives are being called to submit to an authority that has been established by God. But again, as we noted last week, submission has nothing to do with value or worth and everything to do with order. If we are going to say that submission implies inferiority than we would have to look at the incarnate Christ and say that His submission to the Father implied that He was inferior to the Father, when nothing could be further from the truth.

Now, I want us to notice the specificity that Paul gives to show to whom this submission is due. He says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." This is not a call or a command for all women to submit to all men. That is not at all what is going on here. They are to submit to **their own** husbands because of authority given by God. There is no implication here that women in general are below men.

They are not. We have to remember that with regards to the gospel and regards to our salvation, and with regards to our access to God, there is no distinction between men and women. We are all equal before God, we all have equal access to God through Christ, which was a radical concept in the first century.

This was Paul's argument in the book of Galatians chapter 3: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

This is one of the beautiful things about the gospel and about Christianity in general, is that there is no religion or society that has elevated and valued women as they ought to be valued as has Christianity. Because that is what Christ did. We are all equal heirs according to the promise.

Now you may say, "I don't know, our current society has created some pretty large strides for equality with women. Women can do anything men can do now. Don't you think they have valued women more than the church?" Not at all. Valuing women is not found in pushing them to be something that they are not. The point of the passage in Galatians is not to blow up gender distinctions, it is to blow up distinctions with respect to our access to God. Jews and gentiles still exist, men and women still exist, slaves and free still exist. There are still distinctions.

But when you try to eliminate the distinctions between men and women, you are trying to eliminate God's design. You are not elevating women. Men and women are different. That's not wrong, it's beautiful. Any society or household that is willing to place its daughters on the front line of battle is wicked. And that is where the feminist movement ultimately leads. That is not valuing women for who they are; that is hating them and who they were designed to be.

So don't think that our society has elevated women more than the church, it has not. Christianity alone has recognized the true value of women. Our society has elevated women because of its Christian influence, not because of secularism. And you can see that by just examining societies that do not have a Christian history. Get outside of the majority of the west and take a hard look at how women are treated.

Men and women are different, and valuing women is found in celebrating who they are according to God's design, honoring them as equals with distinctions in role and design. So again, when we come to the Scripture and look at this command for submission, this in no way implies inferiority or subjection to all men. God is calling you wives to submit yourselves to your own husband not because you are "less than," but because that is the authority and the order that He has established within the marital union. That is how He has designed us to function.

But it is important to notice here how this verb is functioning in this sentence. Now you will notice in some of your bibles, the command "be subject" or "submit" is in italics. That is because it is actually not there. This is called an ellipsis. Paul is playing off the verb from the previous sentence. It literally just reads, wives to your own husbands. The translators draw down the verb to bring in clarity. Which is just one more reason why we know this whole section is flowing together. But, just as in the previous sentence, the idea here is that this is something that is willingly done by the one performing the action. Wives are the subject of the sentence; they are the ones performing this action and they are called to give their submission to their husbands on their own accord.

This is not a submission that is exacted from someone by a higher authority. Meaning husbands, you are not called to enforce submission in the marital relationship, that is something that she is called to give willingly and freely. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that husbands are to keep their wives submissive. It does say that Fathers are required to keep their children submissive, in fact that is one of the qualifications of an elder. If a man does not keep his children submissive, he is not qualified to be an elder in the church (1 Timothy 3:4).

The point is, husbands, your wife is not to be treated in the same manner as a child. She is your closest advisor, she is your closest confidant, she is to be cherished and nourished (as we will get into next week). We are heirs together in the grace of life and you are to use your headship, not to keep her submissive, but to treat her as an equal for whom you are responsible; for whom you are to lead. You are equals with different roles. You are to lead, and she is to follow.

But that means wives, if your household is going to function properly, it requires not only your husband's leadership but it requires your obedience to this command. It requires your willing submission to the one God has placed over you in authority.

And look at how he has phrased it: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." Your submission to your husband is not ultimately for his sake. It *is* for his sake and for your children's, to be sure. You are loving your family well if you are living this out, but at the end of the day, the Scripture calls you to do this **as to the Lord**. This is to be seen in the reality that this is ultimately the primary means by which you obey and serve Christ with respect to the husband that God has given you. You are to submit to him as to the Lord.

And this aspect is not unique from other ways that we are called to serve the Lord with our day-to-day lives. Turn a page over and look at chapter 6 with me. Verse 5, Paul is addressing slaves or bondservants and look at how they are admonished to serve: "Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord."

The principle is the same. As you submit yourself to your husband, you are to do as you would to Christ. Knowing this is His will and His command for your life. And the promise is true too. Whatever good you do in carrying this out, you will receive back from the Lord.

The reality is, we have to have an eternal perspective on these things and in every area of our lives. We will give an account for how we conducted ourselves within our marriages. And the Lord will reward us for our obedience to Him. But the wife's submission is a very tangible way to directly serve the Lord who bought her, and render obedience and worship of life to Him. So that is the nature of a wife's submission

Now, let's look at the ground or reason for a wife's submission. Look at verse 23: "For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior." Paul roots the responsibility for the wife to willingly submit herself to her husband in two things: The headship of the husband, and the picture of the gospel.

First, he says that the husband is the head of the wife. The question we need to ask is, what does this mean? What is headship? Headship is a term that speaks of authority within a relationship. It speaks leadership that one has due to his position as the head. The head/body metaphor that we see of Christ and the body of Christ, the church, speaks of Christ's authority and leadership over the church. And just like a physical head guides the body, leads the body, so too is a husband to lead his wife.

Now notice, Paul just stated this as a fact. He did not say that a husband is to *assume the role* of the head, or that the husband is to *act like* a leader. He said the husband *is* the head. This is a creational reality. Even if a husband has completely abdicated his role and has allowed his wife to lead everything, it does not change the fact he is the head. And in that situation, he would be leading still, he would just be leading the family into violating God's design.

Men, you are going to lead whether you intend to or not, because you are the head, just by virtue of being a husband. This was established at creation in the creational order. This was Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 11. In verse three he stated, "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. And then he went on to argue for it in verse eight: "For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man." Paul is demonstrating headship by appealing to what took place in the creational account. And notice, he is appealing to creation, not the fall. Headship is not a result of the fall. It is a result of God's good design.

You find this in Genesis chapter two. After the creation account in chapter one, of God creating the world and everything in it, each day of creation ending with this same pattern of God looking upon his creation and seeing that it was good. Over and over, we are told after God creates, "And God saw that it was good." "And God saw that it was good." We get this pattern repeated until we get to chapter two, where God looks at the man that He created and for the first time He says, "it is not good." Why? Because he was alone. There was no counterpart for Adam. There was nothing like him. There was no helper suitable for him.

So God made woman for the man: Listen to this passage from Genesis 2: Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.'"

This is what Paul is appealing to in the passage from 1 Corinthians 11:7. This order of creation was intentional on the part of God, establishing the authority and the headship of a husband over his wife. We see this in the fact that God made woman from man, God made woman for man, and then God brought the woman to the man. We even see the man name the woman both in Genesis two and in Genesis three, all of this demonstrating headship and authority in this created union.

This is a creational reality which is why Paul simply states it as a fact. This means that, contrary to what some have believed or taught, headship cannot be lost. There is a false notion out there that if a

husband does not live according to Scripture, or enters into some kind of sin, or is an unbeliever, that he has given up his headship. Nothing could be further from the truth. The husband is the head by virtue of how God created marriage and man and woman, not by virtue of his earning it or deserving it; not even by virtue of him belonging to Christ. God does not call you to submit to him because he deserves submission. God calls you to submit to him because that is the way He created and designed. When we kick against that, we are kicking against creation and God's design.

That is why when you look at this corresponding topic in 1 Peter 3, he says this: "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Even if they do not obey the word, you are to obey the word by submitting to the one whom God has placed in your life. And believe me when I say this, the God who sees will reward. He will. As Peter says in the very same chapter, "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed."

Sometimes God calls us to do hard things in hard situations, but His grace is enough. You cannot have an idealistic view of submission. Meaning, "I will submit when he does his part." Or, "I will submit when I think he deserves my submission. To say that is the same thing as saying, "I will obey God when he obeys God." That does not in any way show forth Christian maturity, or a heart that wants to please God. No. Submission must be given, even if he does not obey the word. And in that situation, you need to know, it does not go unseen or forgotten. God will reward and God will judge.

But the command to wives to submit to your husband is a command to submit oneself to God's creational order and design. The husband is the head of the wife. So much so that Paul says in verse 23, "even as Christ is the head of the church."

The husband's headship is just as much of a reality as Christ's headship. But this right here is the beauty of all of this: Not only is this rooted in creation, but it is rooted in the fact that the marriage relationship is meant to be a picture of the gospel. A wife's submission is to reflect and show forth the same submission and respect that the Church displays towards Christ. And a husband's headship is meant to reflect the headship of Christ over his bride.

We are going to be talking a lot about that next week, but I think Paul inserts this little line here to remind us of who headship is ultimately for. Look again at what he said: "...even as Christ is the head of the church, and is Himself its savior." Paul inserted that little clause about the saving role of Christ, not because there is necessarily a one-to-one correspondence in the marriage relationship—the husband is not the savior of the wife like Christ is the church—but it shows to what end headship is to be wielded.

Headship is for the good of those who are under authority. It is not just meant for the benefit of the head. We see this with Christ. Christ as our head, saved us by sacrificing Himself on our behalf. Even though we deserved the wrath of God and He did not, because of our sin, Christ as our head stepped in and took our punishment by laying down his own life, bearing the wrath of God on our behalf. Christ saved us and protected us through self-sacrifice. That is what headship is for. For the benefit of those under authority.

Now don't get me wrong, the head still leads. The head still guides. But in such a way as to be for the benefit of the other. We all as the church are called to willingly submit ourselves to our head, to Jesus Christ. That's why we are here to look to his Word and see how our lives can conform to what he has

called us to do. The church, living in obedience to the word of God, is submission to Christ as Lord and as head of the church.

Well, in the same way wives are to submit to their husbands. It is part of your submission to Christ. The church's submission to Christ is the model for the wife's submission to her husband. The question is, to what extent? Right? Let's look at this last point, this last verse and we will close with this. Look at what he says verse 24: "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." The reality is, the scope of one's submission is not limited. The Bible says, "in everything."

Now right up front I want to point out that this obviously does not override everything that Paul has already covered in this letter. This letter is full of commands that are for the entire church. A husband's headship does not overrule the headship of Christ. So, if a husband is leading a wife into disobedience to the word of God, she is not to submit to that. She is not to submit to any form of sin or violation of what God has said.

That is a classic case of the same thing that Peter said in Acts chapter five: "I must obey God rather than man." In fact, I remember a couple years back I got a phone call from a tender-hearted wife whose husband was telling her that she could no longer go to church. And she wanted to obey the Scripture, but the Scripture was saying two things in this case. Submit to your husband and do not forsake the assembling together of the saints. What was she to do? How could she obey God in both?

Well, it is not a hard question. Because what her husband was asking her to do was outside the scope of his authority. Husbands do not have the authority to override what God has said. So, my counsel to her was that you need to disobey your husband and obey God. You are not to follow your husband into sin. You are not to submit to sinful request. You have a Lord whose will supersedes that of your husband's.

But that being said, outside of matters of sin, Scripture is quite clear in this very text that wives should submit in everything to their husbands. The truth is, the reason this goes against our modern western sensibilities is because we so value as a society autonomy and individualism. But you gave that up when you got married. Marriage is not about autonomy and individualism. It is about unity and oneness between two people, who serve God together in roles that do not compete with one another but complement one another to show forth the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, with the husband being the head and the wife created to be the helper of her husband.

Wives, you need not to be ashamed by our culture that biblically speaking your primary calling in life is to your husband. Even above your children and especially above any kind career pursuit. You get those things out of order, and everyone suffers. You put your children above your husband, they will suffer, he will suffer, and you will suffer. You put career pursuits above your calling to your husband, and your children and everyone suffers. Your primary role is to your husband, and you are to submit to him in everything.

Now that does not mean that you are a doormat or that you are to have no say or opinion or anything of that sort. On the contrary you are joint heirs in the grace of life, you are to work through things and navigate life together. You are mutually both to seek to meet one another's needs. And Your husband needs your counsel, your husband needs your insight, your husband needs your wisdom, just like you need his. But the disposition of your heart is to be one who approaches everything with humility and respect and submission to your husband out of obedience to Christ.

In so doing you will be reflecting the very bride of Christ in her humble and submissive approach to her Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, demonstrating to a lost and dying world that your hope and your joy is in God and the gospel that has saved you. And because of that you can joyfully serve and submit to your husband out of love for God.

Wives, don't view this as a burden to bear, but as an opportunity to tangibly serve and glorify the Lord on a daily basis. As you do, you will be entrusting yourself more and more to Him. And to His goodness. And to His purposes. And He will reward you. So wives, joyfully submit to your husbands, as to the Lord.

With that I am going to pray and give you time for prayer and reflection.