

The Biblical Roles of a Wife

As we look back on this sermon series on the topic of marriage, we began with the definition of marriage and the design of marriage. Then, for the last two weeks, we considered the biblical roles of a husband. Today, we turn our attention to the role of the wife.

Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands. Let me begin by saying our culture looks down upon such a claim and hates this truth. And, I would also add that I believe a great portion of those who call themselves “Christian” in our culture, and even those who believe in the authority and inerrancy of Scripture, also do not like to mention this truth. But those who preach the whole counsel of God do not have such liberty. When I read Eph. 5:22: **“Wives, submit to your own husbands,”** at weddings, I know there are great reactions from those listening (as some have mentioned to me). At the end of the day, as Christians we believe that wives should submit to their husbands because it is the clear teaching of the Bible. And our Bible transcends culture.

Now, before moving any further in this subject, let me say quickly that I do not believe the Bible teaches that women must submit to men in general. Today, I am only speaking within the confines of marriage, a husband and a wife. Paul says, **“Wives, submit to your OWN husbands . . .”** He is not telling women to submit to men. HE is speaking about one wife submitting to one husband. With this in mind, I have 4 general reasons wives should submit to their own husbands, followed with some applications.

1. It is the clear teaching of the Bible. Eph. 5:22 is not a suggestion. It is a command. And it is based on the clear teaching of Scripture. Let me read some verses. Gen. 3:16: **“To the woman he said, ‘I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.’”** Col. 3:18: **“Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”** Tit. 2:1-5: **“But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.”** 1 Pet. 3:1: **“Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands . . .”** Then in vv. 5-6: **“For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.”** 1 Cor. 11:3: **“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.”**

2. It is rooted in creation. Lest we think the submission of a wife to a husband came after the fall, we must note that God established the role of the husband and the wife in the creation order, in the first marriage, and this was before the fall. In Gen. 2, there was only the man. And then all the animals were brought for Adam to give them names. And then when he saw there was none like him, God created Eve, taken from the very flesh of Adam. And when Paul teaches about authority within the church, he references creation. In 1 Tim. 2:13, he says, **“For Adam was**

formed first, then Eve . . .” Here, he bases his teaching on authority and elders within the church in CREATION.

3. It pictures the Lordship of Christ and the church’s submission to his authority. Look at Eph. 5:23-24: **“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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”** It is interesting that one of Paul’s major themes in Ephesians is the end-time restoration of all things under the headship of Christ. All things are ordered under the authority of Christ. In Eph. 1:7-10 we read: **“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”** Therefore, in the NT especially, we see that marriage, particularly authoritative roles of husband and wife are a part of something much greater. One of the effects of the fall is rejection of authority. And this is not just between wives and husbands. This is an overarching truth. But, God will make all things right again one day. And in the meantime, within marriage between a husband and a wife, we start to see this order pictured.

4. It pictures the submission of the Son of God to God the Father. 1 Cor. 11:3 says, **“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.”** My question is this: If Christ, in essence is God, which the Scriptures CLEARLY teach, then how can it be that God is said to be the “head” of Christ. This is a great mystery. Yet, from one perspective it is pretty simple. From all eternity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have existed. And they are ONE. However, over and over again and again we see that the Son, particularly in reference to his humiliation (his incarnation, his death on the cross) submits to the authority of the Father. In the same kind of way, men and women, HUSBANDS and WIVES are equal as created “from the dust,” “in the image of God.” Yet God establishes different roles. And as Christ submitted to the will of the Father in all things, even the death of the cross, in the same way so are wives commanded to submit to their husbands in authority.

For the remainder of our time, I want to try and apply these truths and make some comments.

Let me begin with the subject of non-Christian husbands. **Question:** As a Christian wife, how do you submit to a non-Christian husband? First, we know that divorce is not an option. The Apostle Paul, in 1 Cor. 7:13 says: **“If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.”** (He says the same to Christian husbands with unbelieving wives.) So what do you do? Turn to 1 Pet. 3:1-4 as Peter gives clear instructions. Starting in v. 1 he says: **“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, 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 3 Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.”** As a Christian wife, your desire is for the salvation of your husband. And the way you live with your husband may win him. And, by doing this, God is pleased! I would also say here that in the meantime, if

you have kids, you must lead them to the Scriptures, you must lead them to Christ, you must make disciples of your children.

Question: What if your husband is a Christian? However, when you consider his sins, particularly as you do not consider him to be the best leader in certain areas, how do you submit? Simply put (especially after the last two sermons on roles of husbands), He is not acting as you think Christ would act as a husband. And, submission to him is difficult to say the least. 1 Peter 3 also answers this question. Look at vv. 5-6: **“For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.”** Our example is Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Now, you may say, *“Well, my husband isn’t Abraham? If he were I’d submit.”* Well, Abraham was also a sinner. And I’m sure he wasn’t always the best husband. On two occasions, he lied to other men, saying Sarah was his sister, even allowing them to take her, if needed. Later when she could not have a child, he took another woman and had a child with her (Hagar/Ishmael). Yet, through these things (and much more) she submitted to him, even calling him “Lord.”

Wives, it may be difficult to submit to your husband. But, by the providence of God, he is your husband. And your submission, may be the very means God uses to produce godliness in him. You may be more mature than your husband spiritually (I know we are all at different places). If this is so, Gal. 6:1 says, **“Brothers (and sisters), if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.”** Wives, when your husband sinfully yells at you, respond in gentleness. When he does wrong, don’t lash out in anger. When you see all his faults every day, every week, etc. don’t continually point them out. I’ll bet your husband already knows his faults. Instead, pray for him. Tell him you are praying for him. Be patient with him. Love him. Help him. And when he sees your respectful and pure conduct, the godliness of your heart will be revealed. And God will be pleased. And, in your obedience to God, you will be happy.

Application: When you submit to your husband (no matter on the spectrum of godliness or ungodliness he falls) you show to the world the great design of marriage. You are a picture of the church, submitting to the authority of Christ. You also show that you trust God and his sovereignty over all things, even the disobedience of your husband (I KNOW this is hard. I would even say, “impossible,” but not for the Christian wife who has the Holy Spirit.)

Application: Following the previous truth, when you submit to your husband (especially an unbelieving husband) you show that the cause of Christ and his witness to unbelievers is more important than justice in your marriage. (Remember Peter was speaking to wives of unbelievers in vv. 1-4). Following your husband when you get what you want is easy. The challenge is being submissive to your husband when he is not leading in a way you do not appreciate. But when you follow Peter’s advice, you say to yourself, to the world, and to God, the Gospel is most important! Also, you believe that ultimate justice lies with God (1 Pet. 2:23).

Application: Continue to look to Christ as your example. Also, look to him for the ability to obey his commands.

Application: Trust Christ to work in your husband.

Application: Your motive for submission is obedience to God, knowing that your husband is not the ultimate authority. Col. 3:22-25: **“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.”** At the end of the day, any obedience to God, including submission to your husband is “as unto the Lord.”

Application to husbands: By the way we live our lives and treat our wives, we should make submission an easy thing. If you call yourself a Christian and make it difficult for your wife to submit to your authority, then what kind of husband are you. Do you remember we talked about the way we love our wives is directly related to their beauty, particularly their sanctification? We do not lord over our wives, but instead love our wives and live with them in an understanding way. Again, Christ is your example. You are simply a pebble as you represent Christ, who is the ROCK!

Let me end today by reading Prov. 31:10-31: **“An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant. Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.”**