

The Gospel-Driven Family

God's Design for Wives

Pastor Reggie Sanchez, Gospel Community Church

Devotion 3

I. Introduction

1. Mutual Submission, Peace, and Order in the Home

Last time we considered the family, we noted that one of the essential components to unifying a group of people, like a family, is to have a common goal. As Christian families our common goal is that each family member would be saved, and live into a loving relationship with Christ wherein we glorify him in our lives as individuals and in the home. We looked at [Ephesians 5:21](#) wherein we are called to “*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” This means that the spirit and atmosphere of our homes is to be one of mutual appreciation, love, respect, and a glad willingness to defer to the preferences and desires of the other for the purpose of being a blessing to them, and bringing glory to God. In the family, God has called for unity and harmony and has given each family members a different role in glorifying him. This means that the unity, harmony, and loving environment we are called to live into in our homes, is that which exists within the reality that we all play a different role in the family. In order for a peaceful and loving environment to thrive in our homes, we have to know the different roles of the family members and we each have to live into them for the glory of God, and with a sweet spirit, that gladly honors the others and is eager to be a blessing to them.

This is exactly the kind of loving environment and atmosphere that exists in the Trinity. Each person in the Trinity is fully committed to bringing glory to the Godhead, and yet each person in the Trinity has a distinct role to play in achieving this. Despite their different roles, we saw that each member of the Trinity consistently gives honor to the other persons of the Trinity when carrying out their roles. When the Father is glorified, he glorifies himself by glorifying the Son. When the Son is glorified, in his glory, he points to the Father and honors him in the middle of the Son's exaltation! When the Spirit comes, he makes Christ known to believers and in so doing glorifies Jesus. As Christ was near his departure to the Father, he told the disciples that his departure was good for them because it meant he would send the Spirit, and he then proceeded to explain to them how wonderful it was to have the Spirit. So we see in each person of the Trinity that there exists a mutual respect and appreciation for the other member and how they function within the Godhead.

Furthermore, we also saw that the Trinity has always lived in a harmonious, unified, and loving relationship wherein the unity and diversity of the Godhead is gloriously lived out, and tremendous joy, peace, and love is enjoyed and experienced in God as he delights in himself. He is the source of what it means to appreciate different roles, to live in unity and diversity, to live into peace, live into love, and live into harmony, and it is this God who we must know and live into if our homes are going to manifest Trinitarian love. Tonight we will begin our breakdown of the different roles of each family member and we will begin with the consideration of wives for the simple fact that wives are the first ones mentioned in Ephesians 5, which is our main text.

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II. The Role of Wives

1. God's Creational Design for Wives

In [Genesis chapter 1](#) we have the account of creation. In the creation account of Genesis 1, we see in vs. 26-27 that God has made human beings, both male and female, equally in his image. In verse 28 God gave a mandate to male and female image bearers wherein he commanded them to, *"Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living that moves on the earth."* This mandate is to be carried out by the image bearers of God and it is impossible to be fulfilled without a loving and intimate partnership between male and female being carried out in all unity. It is impossible to be fruitful and multiply apart from the partnership, love, and unity of the one flesh union that exists in marriage between a husband and wife. The point is, male and female partnership, love, and unity, is built into the design of creation as is evident in chapter 1.

[Chapter 2](#) gives us even more details about the loving partnership of marriage. In chapter 2 we see everything working together in shalomic harmony, peace, and rest. The ground is yielding its fruit for Adam, the scenery is a paradise, and Adam is able to interact with the animal kingdom without a hint of fear that he will be harmed, nor do the animals have any fear that he will harm them. After Adam names all of the animals, far from learning Adam evolved from them, Adam learns that he is very different from them, and that there was, "no suitable helper for him," and that he was alone (vs. 20).

So to solve this problem, God calls Adam to fall into a deep sleep and from Adam's very being, that is, his side, God creates woman. When Adam awakes, he sees that this woman is so like him, that in verse 23 he bursts forth in exhilaration and says that she is, *"bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man."* Her likeness is so similar to Adam's that he sees her as being of the same ontological essence as himself and he describes her in terms of being of his very flesh and bone. Furthermore, he names her, and in naming her he calls her, "woman," because she was taken from man. Her very name highlights her equality with man because it is so close to his own name, "man." Man and woman are very close etymologically in English, and it is that way in Hebrew as well, and thus we can see from the closeness of their names that there is equality. Verse 24 gives the concluding glorious statement over this entire episode and says, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* In every way, the woman is the perfect helpmate for Adam, is equal to him, and is one with him.

So from the creation account we can see that man and woman are equally in the image of God, they are to live in a profound intimacy, unity and love, and they are partners in fulfilling the creation mandate to rule and fill the earth with other image bearers.

Nevertheless, in this partnership, the man is clearly the authority because he names the woman, which is a sign of his authority over her. Just as God named the creation because of the fact that he has

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authority over it, so also Adam named his wife as an expression of his authority over her. We also see the fact that Adam's wife is under his authority by virtue of the fact that she is called his "helpmate." In a helper-helpmate relationship it is clearly the one being helped who has the authority. So the design of the wife being under the authority of her husband is present from the very outset of creation and is part of God's wise plan. However, even though she is clearly to be under his loving authority, we also see that in this authority and submission relationship, the relationship is to exist as a partnership wherein she is a helper. As a helper she is going to give advice, input, suggestions, an alternate idea, and even bring ideas to correct him at times. She isn't to do this to nag him, destroy him, or belittle him, rather, it is to help him. So Adam is to submit to God's design and in his realization that he has authority over his helpmate, he must also realize that she is his helpmate and partner and not his slave, and he must appreciate her role, be willing to receive her help, and exercise his authority in a wise, loving, and appreciative way.

So the creation's revelation that a wife is under the authority of her husband must be understood against the backdrop that this takes place in the context of a loving, unified, partnership, wherein she is given the essential role of helper and is her husband's equal, even though she has a different role. With that initial consideration, let us now move into our main text for the family in Ephesians 5:22-24.

2. Called to Submission [Eph. 5:22-24](#)

(Read vs. 22) The first outworking of what it means to be a Spirit-filled wife is that she is called to submit to her own husband as to the Lord. She is not called to submit to every husband in the world, the city, or the church, rather, she is to submit to her own husband. The manner of submission here is that it is to correspond to her own submission to the Lord. To the Lord, she is called to submit her entire life and follow Him wherever he leads her. In like manner, she is also called to submit to her husband. Paul also gave the same command in [Colossians 3:18](#).

In verse 23 Paul gives some explanation as to why this is to occur (read vs. 23.) The reason why she is to submit to him is because the husband is her, "head," or authority. Where does Paul get that from? I believe he gets it from the creation account that we have already considered wherein it is very clear that she is the one under authority. So the reason she is to submit to her husband as to the Lord, is because he is the authority over her. In verse 23 the authority of the husband over the wife, is compared to the authority Christ has over the church.

(Read vs. 24.) As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in "*everything to their husbands.*" She is fully and thoroughly under the authority of her husband just as the church is under the authority of Christ, and it is the calling of a wife to be submissive to her own husband in this way. I very much appreciated MacArthur's observation, which I wholeheartedly agree with, that the wife is not called to submit "if" her husband is godly, or if he is fulfilling his role the way he ought to be, or "if" he is exerting his authority the right way. Of course that would be ideal; that is what should happen.

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However, regardless of how well the husband is or is not living into his role, the wife is called to submit to him in all things.

Again, the design of God for the family is for everyone to live into their roles rightly in an environment where there is peace, harmony, mutual respect, love, and appreciation for each other. We will get to the other roles as we go on, but each person must understand their roles and keep themselves accountable to live into their roles and we can only go through one role at a time, and here we see the wife is commanded to submit to her husband in everything.

3. Exceptions

The only exceptions to this would be if the husband is demanding that you sin or that you deny what you believe to be true from God's Word. We are commanded to go to church and be a part of the body. If a husband tells you not to do this and tries to justify it with submission, a wife is free to not listen to that because she would be sinning against God. If a husband asks a wife to sin with him in any way, she is free to not submit to him. If a husband demands that she embrace error or heresy, and her mind is sincerely convinced from the Scripture that he is wrong, she does not have to submit to his false doctrine. If a husband is abusing the children, and demands the wife submits to him in covering up his crimes, she is not to submit to that, but rather, should contact the authorities, which is submitting to her government ([Romans 13:1-7](#)), and turn him in. In fact, earlier in [chapter 5](#), as the Spirit-filled community, we are called to have nothing to do with the evil deeds of darkness, but rather, we are to expose them ([Eph. 5:11](#)). So, if there arises serious issues of unrepentant sin in a husband's life, a wife must go to the governing authorities if appropriate, and also to her church leadership to seek help. This isn't disrespectful, sinful, or wrong. It is living as light and using God's ordained means to help your husband deal with his sin that he refuses to repent of. So the general rule of thumb as it pertains to valid reasons not to submit to your husband is that you do not have to submit to him if he calls you to sin, or embrace false teaching.

III. The Attitude of Submission

1. The Attitude of Submission Ephesians 5:33 Respect

It is possible for a wife to know that she is called to submit to her husband, know that this is an outworking of her own submission to God, and submit while resenting every moment of it. That would not honor God, nor would it be fulfilling her calling in a manner that is pleasing to Christ. In the final thing Paul says in Ephesians on wives, he tells us what the attitude is that the wife is to have towards her husband (read vs. 33). The wife's submission is to be an expression of genuine respect and love for her husband. A wife who submits to her husband and then mutters insults or rebellious words under her breath is not a wife who is submitting as God would have her to do. A wife who submits to her husband and then slams him to all of her friends about what an idiot he is, is not a wife who is submitting in a manner pleasing to God. A wife who submits to her husband but then imprisons the house with her

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angry demeanor, body language, and attitudes, is not a wife who is submitting in a godly way. That is how godless and worldly wives submit.

A godly wife knows how to submit to her husband in a respectful way even if she disagrees with his decision. She knows how to crucify her pride, put to death her agenda, lay down her anger, and entrust her soul to God, while she respectfully submits to a decision her husband has made that she doesn't like. After she has stated her case, after she has lovingly and graciously offered her opinions in fulfillment as her role not just as submissive wife, but also respected helpmate, if her husband doesn't heed her suggestions and advice, or even if he makes a decision without soliciting her advice or thoughts and she is not pleased by this, her calling is still to submit to his decision and to do it respectfully. I want to now take a look at 1 Peter 3 at this point, and as we consider this text, we will see not only are these things repeated and even expanded upon, but also, there is a great promise and hope for wives in this passage as well.

2. The Attitude of Submission [1 Peter 3:1-4](#): Respectful & Pure Conduct with a Quiet, Gentle Spirit

(Read vs. 1-2). Here, Peter, like Paul, is clearly commanding wives to be submissive to their husbands, and he commands them to do so, even if their husband is an unbeliever. So again we see that the notion that a wife is only commanded to submit to a godly husband is biblically invalid. She is called to submit to her husband regardless of his conversion, personal godliness, or faithfulness. We also see here the type of spirit and attitude with which she is to submit. She is called to carry out her role of submission with, "*respectful and pure conduct.*" Just as Paul commanded wives to respect their husbands in Ephesians 5:33, so also Peter is calling for a submission that is characterized by respectful and pure conduct.

Sinful, complaining, belittling, disrespectful, spiteful, and cantankerous submission is not pleasing to God, and the wife is sinning if her submission is like this, and she needs to repent and she should expect that her witness is going to have 0 power in changing her husband. It is ironic that one of the reasons wives justify themselves in their lack of submission, or in their sinful submission is through the accusations that their husbands are poor spiritual leaders. A worldly wife, will be disrespectful and impure in her conduct and think that somehow if she punishes her husband this way, or treats him this way, it may create the change she is looking for. But this text says the opposite. What has the power to change a husband, even an unbelieving husband into a Christian? It is not the belittling, hen-pecking, disrespectful belittling and moping of a worldly wife, rather, it is the respectful submission of a godly wife whose conduct is pure before the Lord.

As we continue on in [1 Peter 3](#) we see that Peter draws attention to something else that will not win their husbands over to godliness (read vs. 3-4.) Here Peter tells the wives that the emphasis of their beauty is not to be external. I don't believe this text forbids wives from looking nice for their husbands in appropriate settings and occasions. Rather, I believe what he is saying is that the emphasis of her

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beauty through which she will win her husband to godliness is not external, but rather, it is the inner beauty of godliness.

Some have insisted that we need a “literal” reading of this text and must demand women not wear jewelry or makeup lest we ignore the Scriptures! For these people, the only valid so-called “literal,” reading of this text is to forbid that women wear these things in any and all circumstances! However, as Thomas Schreiner has noted, a genuinely literal reading of the Greek says that a woman’s adorning shouldn’t be external by the putting on of clothes. So if we truly want to be “literal” then the text, in its most literal form is calling for the wife to not wear clothes. Of course that isn’t what the text is calling for. What the text is doing is contrasting two types of beauties. There is the external beauty and the internal beauty and the external beauty of a wife has no power to change a husband, whereas the internal beauty of a wife is so powerful, that it is not only an effective weapon for the sanctifying of a Christian husband, but it is even effective unto the conversion of an unbelieving husband. That is the type of beauty that the wife is to be focused upon cultivating.

So what is the internal beauty? It is the, “...*hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.*” Wives do you want to be effective with your husbands and seen as precious by God? The way to do that is not through the treadmill, fine clothing, and makeup, but rather, it is through the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. I don’t believe “quiet spirit” is to be pressed to the absurdity of saying you can’t ever talk. That would destroy your role as a helpmate. Rather, it means that in all of your essential suggestions, exhortations, admonitions, advice, and counsel, you are carrying yourself in a manner wherein your expression of these things reflects that you are gentle, and that your spirit is quieted with a deep peace in God, rather than being a loud and boisterous spirit that is tearing down your entire house with your mouth.

This is such a wonderful and mighty thing in the Kingdom of God! It is beautiful, it pleases God, and it is extremely effective. When I have been in Christian houses and have seen godly wives conduct themselves this way, I have a deep awe, respect, and even a holy fear of these women, because I know God is with them. I want to read a Proverb, in addition to 1 Peter so show from God’s Word how, for better or worse, a wife is extremely powerful, “*An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones.*” ([Proverbs 12:4](#))

No wife wants to be rottenness to the bones of her husband, instead, she wants to be a crown of glory for him. When her godliness is seen and displayed in her home, the church, and the world, it honors her husband greatly, and it should be the desire of every wife, to adorn herself with a submissive, quiet, gentle, and respectful spirit, as she loves her husband as his essential helpmate, and lovingly submits to his leadership.

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IV. Hope in God: The Anchor and Power of a Godly Wife

1. The Godly Wife's Resource to Live into Her Role: [1 Peter 3:5](#)

So how is a wife going to be enabled to live into this incredibly high, glorious, and dignified calling? I am going to read verse 5 and I want you to see if you can discern where a wife's power to do this comes from, "*For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands...*" The key to the lives of these women, whom Peter calls, "holy," and those who, "*submit to their own husbands,*" is that they, "*hoped in God.*" The role of a submissive helpmate for a wife in marriage is God's design and purpose for wives, and when he designed this, he had their joy and blessing in mind, not their oppressive subjugation and misery! Godly women trust the good God who designed marriage this way, who placed them in marriage to "their own husband," and who calls them to conduct themselves in holiness by being a loving, submissive helpmate, who respects her husband and carries herself with pure conduct before the Lord.

The primary reason godly women fulfill this calling in their lives is because they first and foremost know, love, submit to, and hope in God. They trust that as they follow him by faith, in joyful obedience to his calling on their lives, he will be pleased with them, he will draw near to them, he will grant them a deep and loving fellowship with himself, and he will be enough for them, even if they are submitting to something they do not want.

The more focused a wife is on her husband, the fact that she has to submit to something she disagrees with, and the fact that she is not getting her way, the more disrespectful, impure, aggressive, and loud her conduct will be, and she will be displeasing in God's sight and rottenness to her husband's bones when she does this, and she will act this way if she is focused on her husband. On the other hand, the more she is able to look to a good God, who has saved her through the crucifixion of Jesus, who is sovereign over every detail in her life, who wisely joined her together in marriage to her husband, who promises to never leave her, who promises to work everything for her good, even stupid decisions by her husband that she respectfully disagrees with but submits to, and who promises that as she lives into his calling and design for her life she will experience the joy of the Lord, the more she will be enabled to live into her role and calling as a wife! Hope in God is the power for godly wives to live into their roles, and Peter gives us an example of such a wife.

2. Sarah is the example

(Read vs. 6). Sarah obeyed Abraham and even called him Lord as an example of this kind of living. Furthermore, we see that as she did this, she gave her fears and anxieties about submission to Abraham to God. We know this because women are Sarah's offspring if they do good like she did. What is the good? It is being submissive and obedient to Abraham, as well as not, "*fearing anything that is frightening.*" Sarah had many situations in her life with Abraham, wherein submitting to him could have been terrifying.

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In [Genesis 12:1](#) God called Abram, at age 75, to leave his homeland and journey, with all of his belongings and with his wife who was in her 60s, and move to Canaan, which was a very far journey. We don't have their conversation recorded but I wish we did! One day we know Abram informed Sarai that God had appeared to him and told him they need to pack everything up and move to Canaan! We have no idea if Sarai wrestled with this, if there was any deliberation on it, or if she just immediately rejoiced. What we do know, is that even though it could be incredibly scary to move such a far distance with such a great amount of possessions, Sarai hoped in God and submitted to Abram, whom God was commanding to move to Canaan.

At the end of chapter 12 there was a famine in Canaan and Abram took Sarai to Egypt to stay there until the famine was over. While journeying there, he knew that the men who saw her would be enamored with her beauty and if they wanted to take her as a wife they would kill him. So he asks Sarai to tell everyone that she is his sister! This was actually true because she was his half-sister, they are just leaving out the fact that she was also his wife. Sarai obeyed Abram in doing this and again hoped in God, even though this presented terrifying situations for her. She was taken into Pharaoh's harem and was in the frightening place of being potentially violated by him. But her hope in God did not disappoint her! God intervened and threatened to kill Pharaoh if he didn't let her go! A very similar episode happened to her in Genesis 20 with Abimelech in Gerar. Again, she submitted to Abraham and trusted in God, and again, she was delivered by the power of God.

The story of Sarah is a powerful example of a godly woman, who hoped in the Lord, his goodness, and his design for her in marriage to a man who was far from perfect, and even though she was asked to submit to him in some scary situations, she hoped in God, and found his deliverance! How overjoyed do you think she was when she was delivered?! The key to submitting to your husband, is hoping in the good and powerful God who calls you to submit.

Nowhere was his goodness more powerfully displayed than at the cross of Christ. Jesus, like all good wives, entrusted his soul to God and submitted to the Father's will to send him to the cross. At the cross Jesus achieved the salvation of his people, the glory of the Father, and it led to the glory of the resurrection. After being resurrected, he ascended to the throne and was given the name above all names, and the promise, that all human beings, will bow in submission to him, the one who himself was submissive to God. It wasn't always easy or pleasant for Jesus to submit, and it won't always be that way for a wife, but hoping in God is the key to living into this role by faith!