

Reforming the Mess of Modern Marriage #3

Wives, Mothers, Fruitfulness, Femininity, and All That is Good – *Eph 5:21-6:4*

Introduction – We live in a world in the grip of egalitarianism, awash in a sea of “no difference.” There are no universal definitions (marriage), no assigned roles (husband, wife), no assigned biology (male, female). We are simply the result of random chance so we can construct ourselves into anything we want to be. But in reality, the throwing off of the old “tired traditions” in the name of women’s rights and feminism, has been to the detriment and security of women. CS Lewis writes, “A society in which conjugal infidelity is tolerated must always be in the long run a society adverse to women. Women, whatever a few male songs and satires may say to the contrary, are more naturally monogamous than men; it is a biological necessity. Where promiscuity prevails, they will therefore always be more often the victims than the culprits.” But when women take on their appointed directives from the Lord in society, the fruitfulness, glory, and satisfaction abound (Prov 31:26-31).

First Things First – A wife cannot obey Eph 5:22 towards her husband until she has first obeyed “*as to the Lord*.” This means she must know what it means to have come under the loving authority of her heavenly Father. She must drink deeply of the waters of forgiveness and grace, and have found her identity in Christ for her life and eternal security (Phil 3:7-11).

Her Discipleship Call – While she is called to respond to her husband with obedience, respect, and submission, it is all to be in response to her loyalty to Christ first. Therefore, submission to husbands must be taught with the important caveat of teaching women their responsibility to be an Abigail if married to a Nabal. As with the man’s first love, so with the woman’s first loyalty: it must be to the Lord Jesus Christ. A wife’s submission to her husband is never absolute. Because it is “*as to the Lord*,” there are times when a woman submissively declines to follow her husband and even goes to other authorities. However, that is not the usual place where applying these verses is difficult.

And, while this is about the role of a wife and mother, it must be said that the Scriptures require that the husband take full responsibility for his wife’s embrace of her role (see last sermon). One pastor friend of mine put it this way: “*a wife must submit to her husband, and a husband must make that submission a joy for his wife*.” Both can be a great challenge.

The Ministry of a Wife – In the role of a wife, a particular woman has been made for a particular man to be his helper in the work of obeying God. To be in submission to her husband is to be “under” (sub) his “mission” (the obedience of God) and God has told him to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it. His mission points outward and her submission points towards him. He should and will be more task-oriented and she should and will be more relationship-oriented.

Biblical submission is to be rendered by a wife to her “*own husband*” (1 Pet 3:1). And while the cosmos is patriarchal where men should generally be leading, there is no requirement of universal submission of women to men, or of any given woman to any given man. This submission to her own husband is actually a protection from that.

A Feminine Ministry - Her respect, submission, and obedience to her husband flows from her femininity. Masculinity, recall, is the glad assumption of sacrificial responsibility. Femininity is the grateful responsiveness to that initiating responsibility with grace, wisdom and glory. He builds a house. She makes a home. He gives the seed. She makes a child. Through it all there is a mutual indwelling of one another, just as the Son submits to the Father and yet are equal in nature and value.

Learning from the Older Women (Titus 2:3-5) – Women are to learn wisdom from older women, and they can see from Paul what kinds of lessons to look for. The older women are first instructed themselves against any of their own temptations (they are to be “*reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things*,” – with an eye to admonish the younger women). Paul seems to be generalizing what kinds of temptations older women may need to remember to continue to mortify.

Home-Centered (v4-5) – You can see in these verses and in Prov 31 that the wife is to have her priorities towards the home, which is different than saying that her ‘place’ is in the home. She is to learn great skills in dominion and management of the home. She oversees the spending of the home budget (Prov 31:14), but she might also make decisions in the purchase and sale of property and goods (31:16, 24). She brings these things into the home to make the home a glorious place of feasting, rest and ministry (vv15, 20-21, 27-28). “*She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness*” (v26). The idea that this is not a real vocation (“*yes, but do you work?*”) is proof that this culture despises women and the ministry of a wife and mother.

Husband-Centered – Titus 2:4 reads literally “*husband-lovers*.” Eph 5:33 calls wives to respect their husbands. The word there is *phobos*, to fear or reverence. Together, this means more than not showing disrespect, although it does mean that. She is to have a positive display of admiration, honor, and reverence to and about her husband (“*Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons*.” – Songs 2:3). This verse continues, “*I sat down in his shade with great delight*” and goes on to describe the erotic love of husband and wife. Honoring her husband includes her responsiveness. She is to gladly receive his advances, both as a holy blessing (Heb 13:4), and as a protection for her and her husband (1 Cor 7:3-4). “*I am my beloved’s and his desire is toward me*” (Songs 7:10).

Children-Centered – The fruit of such husband-loving is, naturally and regularly, children. Titus 2:4 also reads literally “*children-lovers*.” And this means, that as God grants the opportunity for children, her day-to-day activities will be filled with them. These are your disciples; this is your ministry. These are the ones God has given you (and your husband) in that cultural mandate to “*fill the earth*.”

Obedient To Her Own Husband (Titus 2:5) – Submission is not something you have to think about doing unless it is in a time when you differ with your husband. Obedience is something that only has to be admonished when the wife would rather not. In the little things and in the big things, she is to honor her head in this way. (book plug – *Eve in Exile and the Restoration of Femininity* – Rebekah Merkle).

The Glory and Power of a Godly Wife – “*An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, But she who causes shame is like rottenness in his bones*” (Prov 12:4). As we have seen, the relationship of husband and wife is the quintessential picture of Christ and the church. Christ bestows glory and His bride reflects that glory which He wears as His crown. The excellent wife reflects this, she submits to her own husband as to the Lord, and this is a great mystery (Eph 5:22, 32).

The Glory of Trinitarian Submission – When Christ submitted to the Father, He in no way became the Father’s doormat. Biblical submission transforms others. Biblical submission moves to exaltation and glory. Biblical submission follows the pattern of death and resurrection and so declares the gospel when aligned with biblical headship. “*This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church*” (Eph 5:32) and so, of course the unbelieving culture around us cannot understand it.

The Dance of Trinitarian Submission – The head needs glory to rest on it in order to be crowned, and a crown needs a head to show forth its glory. But let us change the metaphor. In a Unitarian world, authority and submission is a fist fight with a winner and a loser, someone on top and someone beat down. In a Trinitarian world, authority and submission are a lovely dance. No gentleman bows to a lady after a dance and declares himself “*the winner*.” At the same time, his authority is in no way demeaning to her. He leads in the dance and the better he leads, the more he showcases his lady. She follows his lead, and his glory is revealed. All eyes fall on her and them, for he is dancing with his glory.