

IS YOUR MARRIAGE - YOUR PRIMARY MINISTRY?

This morning a little five year old boy slid up on my lap while I was hunched over my laptop typing. He said, "Dad, have we had good morning prayer time yet?" he must have forgotten that he had slid in and put his arms around Bonnie and I as we started our day in prayer together early this morning, like we try to do every day. He came up while we prayed, wrapped those chubby little arms around our shoulders and chimed right in with a very creative and heartfelt prayer.

But later as he came to me he had something on his mind, so he wanted to pray again. His prayer was short and simple.

"Dear God, help me NEVER become an ak-o-holie (not sure where he heard about that) and NEVER walk around with a bottle (possibly from a John Wayne movie he seems to watch a lot or our trip by New York City last week, or something) but I want to be the BEST SERVANT OF THE LORD THERE EVER WAS."

Do you have as clear a mandate about life? Children reduce life to its bare essentials; they know what really matters – love, time, food, and the Lord!

- o Do you know what is your highest earthly calling TO MINISTRY?
- o Do you know what is most important to God about MEASURING the fruitfulness to God of your life today?
- o What is the primary ministry each one of us publicly signed up for? Is it parenting, educating our children, and serving in Christ's church, missions, Sunday school, youth work, evangelism?

All of these are important to God, but did the Lord declare that they are our PRIMARY MINISTRY that we were created to fulfill?

God's blueprint¹ for marriage is in Genesis 2: 18-25.

¹ This section and the rest of this message are all adaptations, quotations, and allusions to sections of the fantastic outline in Wayne Mack, *Strengthening You Marriage*, Phillipsburg, NJ, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.. 1977, Page 1-4
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After combing God's Word for all that He has instructed us about marriage, I have found only one description of marriage that God chooses to repeatedly present to us. Four times in the Bible the Lord clearly states what He wants us to do – what our SIMPLE MANDATE is to be in marriage. These four declarations are in Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7,8, and Ephesians 5:31. Here is our SIMPLE and very CLEAR MANDATE:

“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

Four times God says the same thing. Four times God repeats Himself. Four times the Lord clearly maps out what He wants us to do and to be if we are married.

Now for those of you who like to really study a topic in God's Word here are some interesting facts:

- o God’s Mandate for Marriage is stated once in the Old Testament and three times in the New Testament.
- o God’s Mandate for Marriage is stated once before man fell into sin and three times after man fell into sin.
- o God’s Mandate for Marriage is God’s marital purpose for perfect man and for sinful man.
- o God’s Mandate for Marriage is God’s all-time blueprint for a good marriage.

An honest examination² of scriptural data leads to the conclusion that the wife's primary ministry in life is her husband, and the husband's primary ministry in life is his wife! Everything we do is tied to that.

God says our prayers the very life breath of spiritual life are hindered if we don't follow His plan and live like Marriage is OUR PRIMARY MINISTRY!

When God created Eve for Adam He said, ' It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable [literally, corresponding to] for him. And out of the ground the Lord formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky. ...But for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of the ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man" (Gen. 2:18-22).

If we want to most fully serve the Lord then we shouldn't get married is what Paul said. In other words certain people (like Jeremiah and the 144,000) and certain times (like the persecutions of the early church) are times that marriage may not be best.

² From Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, Phillipsburg, NJ, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.. 1977, Page 13-18.
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1 Corinthians 7:32-33 But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. 33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife.

But for most of history and for most of God's servants – their marriage is to be their PRIMARY MINISTRY. Marriage is what God created us for.

Think about the Genesis Mandate that God repeats 4 times. Several important facts about our marriage relationship emerge from this passage.

1. **Husbands are INCOMPLETE without a godly wife.** GOD MADE THE WOMAN TO BE MAN'S HELPER. Without the woman, man, even in his perfect condition, was incomplete.
2. **Husbands are ONLY COMPLETED by a godly wife.** GOD MADE THE WOMAN TO BE A SUITABLE HELPER. None of the animals could provide the kind of help that man needed. Only woman could do that. "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord" (Prov. 18:22). 'An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain" (Prov. 31: 10, 11). I can try to fill my life with activity and ministry but if I neglect my primary ministry of my marriage – I am a failure!
3. **Husbands are DIFFERENT than their wife.** GOD CREATED THE WOMAN TO CORRESPOND TO MAN. She is similar to man, yet somewhat different. She is man's complement, not his carbon copy. She is to man what a key is to a lock and what a film is to a camera-indispensable. 1 Corinthians 11:11 Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord.
4. **Husbands are ONLY ABLE TO SUCCEED by a biblical partnership with a godly wife.** ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURE THE WIFE WAS MADE TO FULFILL THE NEEDS, THE LACKS, THE INADEQUACIES OF HER HUSBAND.
 - o She was made to be her husband's unique helper. She is to "do him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Prov. 31:12).
 - o She is to be like a fruitful vine in her husband's house (Ps. 128:3).
 - o She is to be "one flesh" with her husband, and this will happen only as she accepts and fulfills her God-appointed role in marriage. This does not mean that everything she does must have a direct connection to her husband. Nor does it mean that she should never do anything for her own benefit or for the benefit of others, or that she should never become involved in activities or ministries outside the home (Prov. 31:10-31). It does mean, however, that she ought never to do anything which would be detrimental or harmful to her husband or that would

cause her to neglect her primary ministry of helping her husband (Prov. 31:10-31).

And now becoming very specific, I want to suggest some ways in which a wife may help her husband. She may help her husband in word and in deed, at home and at heart.

THE WIFE'S MANDATE

1. **A PRIORITY OF THE IRRESISTABLE HOME. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** be making her home a safe place—a place of encouragement, comfort, understanding and refuge. Your home can be that shining beacon on the hill that beckons your husband to come. It should be the place he would rather be when he is at work and at play. It is his place of refreshment, renewal, and refocus. You are the guardian of that place. When activities and the urgent over run this priority all must be stopped and the home reset to be the place of refuge your husband needs. Proverbs 31:11 The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain.
2. **A PRIORITY OF REVERENCE. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** not joke about her husband or make cutting remarks to him. She won't constantly remind him of his faults, mistakes, and failures. Rather she will correct him only if it is absolutely necessary. She will avoid the danger of allowing the home to be in shambles and full of disorder and confusion. But also avoid the danger of making the house a show place where everything must always be neat and immaculate. Husbands want homes to live in, not show places to visit. This is all bound up in her being trustworthy and dependable Proverbs 31:12 She does him good and not evil All the days of her life. Ephesians 5:33 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.
3. **A PRIORITY OF CHEERFULNESS. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** be maintaining a good attitude (Prov. 31:26, 28, 29; James 3:13-18; Phil.4: 4). James 3:13-18 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord

always. Again I will say, rejoice! Proverbs 31:26-29 She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue is the law of kindness. 27 She watches over the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness. 28 Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her: 29 "Many daughters have done well, But you excel them all." (The reason the Proverbs 31 woman is so amazing is that her marriage was at the center of all she did. It was her PRIMARY MINISTRY!)

4. **A PRIORITY OF COMMUNICATION. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** be discussing things lovingly, openly, and honestly. Ephesians 4:29-32 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.
5. **A PRIORITY OF CONTENTMENT. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** be satisfied with her position, her possessions, her tasks (Phil. 4:6-13; Heb. 13:5,16). Philippians 4:6-13 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. 10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
6. **A PRIORITY OF PATIENCE. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** be long suffering, forgiving, and forbearing (Eph. 4:2,31,32; Col.3:12-14). Colossians 3:12-14 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

7. **A PRIORITY OF CARING. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** be showing an interest in his problems and concerns. Philippians 2:3-4 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.
8. **A PRIORITY OF INDUSTRIOUSNESS. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** be an industrious, frugal, diligent, ambitious, and creative member of the team (Ps. 128:3; Prov. 31:10-31).
9. **A PRIORITY OF HELPFULNESS. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** be offering suggestions, advice, and corrections when needed in a loving fashion. Proverbs 31:26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue is the law of kindness.
10. **A PRIORITY OF BEAUTY. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** be keeping herself beautiful, especially in the inner person. 1 Peter 3:3-5 Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— 4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. 5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,
11. **A PRIORITY OF DEVOTION. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** be maintaining a good spiritual life I Pet. 3:1,2,7 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. 7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.
12. **A PRIORITY OF AGREEMENT. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** be cooperating with him in raising children (Eph. 6:20; Prov. 31: 26-28, 1 Tim. 5.13: 14). 1 Timothy 5:13-14 And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. 14 Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.
13. **A PRIORITY OF LOYALTY. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** *be building loyalty to him in the children.* The wife's attitudes toward the husband are quickly picked up by the children. Lack of respect or confidence in his leadership, complaints about what he has or has not done will have debilitating influence on the children. She must avoid taking sides with the children or anyone against her husband. She must support

and cooperate with him in discipline. All differences of opinion about discipline should be settled away from the children. Amos 3:3 Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

14. **A PRIORITY OF GRATITUDE. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** *express regular gratefulness to her husband.* Appreciation should be expressed freely and in a variety of ways. Romans 13:7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. 1 Peter 3:6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.
15. **A PRIORITY OF CONFIDENCE. A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will** *be showing confidence in his decisions.* Disdain, lack of confidence, anxiety, or strong opposition over his decisions may cause him to become indecisive, defensive, or reactionary. If the wife doubts the wisdom of important decisions, she should ask questions in a non-threatening way, assuming that there are some facts she does not know and that he really does want what is best for them both (1 Cor. 13:4-8). 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

THE HUSBAND'S MANDATE

There are, of course, many passages³ in the Bible which speak of the man's part in marriage. Some of the key passages are Genesis 3:16; Ephesians 5:23-33; 1 Timothy 3:4,5; Psalm 128; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 Corinthians 7:3,4; Proverbs 5:15-19; Colossians 3:19. As I read these passages I hear God saying that the husband has two primary responsibilities to his wife.

1. He is to be his wife's leader.
2. He is to be his wife's lover.

The husband is to be his wife's leader (Eph 5:23; 1 Tim. 3: 4, 5, 12; 1 Cor. 11:3). Matthew 20:20-28 gives us the Bible's concept of a leader.

³ From Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, Phillipsburg, NJ, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.. 1977, Pages 27-36.

Husbands, God call you to be your wife's leader. This means that you must be your wife's servant, that you must spend much time with her, that you must give her useful, scriptural and practical instruction, that you must be a good example to her, and that you must make decisions and delegate responsibilities in your home. Of the many elements involved in developing genuine oneness, none is more important than this one. Unquestionably, it is the other side of the marital coin. If genuine oneness is to be experienced, the lifestyle of the wife must be genuine biblical submission. Conversely, the lifestyle of the husband must be the kind of leadership that has just been described. But the Bible not only says that the husband must be his wife's leader, it also asserts that he is to be his wife's lover.

The husband is not only to be a leader, he is to be a loving leader. The importance of husbandly love has already been implied in what has previously been said about the husband, but now it must be emphasized and amplified. The wife has such a great need for love or the husband has such a great lack of love, that God commands the husband to love his wife three times within the space of a few verses in Ephesians 5. Two times in this passage God enjoins the husband to love his wife even as he loves himself (vss. 28, 33). One time God instructs the husband to love his wife just as Christ also loved the church (vs. 25).

Oceans of truth concerning the husband's relationship to his wife are opened to us by these verses. Normally, a man uses a lot of time and gives a great deal of thought, effort, and money to take care of himself. His needs, his desires, his aspirations, his hopes, his body, his comfort are very important to him. He nourishes and cherishes himself.

- o He carefully protects and provides for the needs of his body.
- o He does not deliberately do that which would bring harm to himself.
- o When he is hungry, he eats. When he is thirsty, he drinks. When he is tired, he sleeps. When he is in pain, he goes to the doctor. When he cuts himself, he washes the wound and binds it up. When he sees an object coming toward him, he puts up his hands for protection.
- o He very naturally and carefully and fervently nourishes and cherishes himself. "Well," the Scripture indicates, "this is the way a man is to love his wife. He is to nourish her, cherish her, protect her, satisfy her, provide for her, care for her, sacrifice for her to the same degree and extent, and in the same manner as he does himself."

Now that is a lot of love that a husband is to have for his wife. That is a high standard for a husband to keep, but there is still a higher standard. Scripture says, "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church."

Who then can understand, who then can plumb the depths of the love of Jesus for His people? But this much we do know about love of Christ for His people.

- o It is an unconditional or free love (Rom. 5:8).
- o It is a volitional love. He chooses to love us (Deut. 7:7; Eph. 1:6,7).

- o It is an intense love (John 13:1; Eph. 5: 2,25).
- o It is an unending love (John 13:1; Jer. 31:3; Rom. 8:39).
- o It is an unselfish love (Phil. 2:6, 7).
- o It is a purposeful love.
- o It is a sacrificial love. Eph. 5:2, 24; Gal. 2:20; 1 Pet. 3:18; Rom. 5:6-11; 1 Pet. 2:24).
- o It is a manifested love. John 10:1-14; 14:1-3; 13:34,35; 15:9-10; Rom. 8:32; Phil. 4:13, 19; Heb. 4:14-16).

So how can we as husbands love our wives with Christ's love? Here are just a few ideas:

1. **A PRIORITY OF HUMILITY. A husband who believes his primary ministry is marriage will** be like Jesus. Jesus as a leader was first and foremost a servant. John 13:1-15 gives us the same picture of what it means to be a leader. In this passage, the emblem of leadership is not a throne or a club but a big towel and a basin. In other words, a leader must have a servant's heart. And if he has a servant's heart, he will act like a servant and react like a servant - when he is treated like a servant. 1 Peter 5:3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;
2. **A PRIORITY OF SERVANTHOOD. A husband who believes his primary ministry is marriage will** be the family's biggest servant. He is to be the head of his wife even as Christ is the head of the church {Eph. 5:23}. His great model in leadership is Jesus Christ, who made Himself a servant (Phil. 2: 6-8); who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45); who is head over all things for the sake of the church (Eph. 1:22, 23). Whatever Jesus Christ does, He does for our sake; He does with our best interests at heart. In similar fashion, the husband is to live for the sake of his wife, always keeping her best interests at heart. He is to be his wife's servant-leader.
 - o **A servant stays close to those he serves.** Jesus Christ practiced the principle of continuous association with those whom He led. He did not lead His disciples by long distance telephone calls, or by writing them a few letters or by infrequent visits. For over three years, He spent great amounts of time with them. (Compare John 1:39,43; Mark 1:17; 3:14; 4:10; 5:1,30,31,40; 6:1,30,31,32,35; 8:1,10,27,34; 9:2,30; 10:13,23,46; 11:1.) Biblical leadership requires association with those who are being led.
 - o **A servant clearly talks to those he serves.** Jesus Christ carefully and relevantly instructed His disciples.
 - o **A servant clearly lives before those he serves.** Jesus Christ led His disciples by being a good example.
 - o **A servant clearly does his job for those he serves.** Jesus Christ led His disciples by making decisions and delegating responsibility to them. Compare John 4:1,2; Mark 1:35-39;

6:7; 6:35-43; John 11:39-44; Matt. 10:1-14; 16:21-23; 21:1,2; 28:18-20, where Jesus made decisions and delegated responsibilities to His disciples. Similarly, Christian husbands are called upon to lead their wives by making decisions and by delegating responsibility. To be the leader does not mean that he must bear all the responsibility and do all the work while his wife bears nothing and does nothing. It does mean that he will see to it that the work gets done and that everyone knows who does what. In marriage someone has to be the final decision maker. Someone has to delegate responsibility, and God has ordained that this should be the husband. Indeed, the husbands must make decisions and delegate responsibility as a servant of his wife.

3. **A PRIORITY OF KIND WORDS. A husband who believes his primary ministry is marriage will** practice one of the simplest, yet most neglected, ways of communicating love - by way of words spoken kindly, warmly, and directly toward his wife. John 7:46 The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" Remember those words in the hymn In the Garden? "He speaks and the sound of His voice..."
4. **A PRIORITY OF KIND DEEDS. A husband who believes his primary ministry is marriage will** love his wife by providing for the satisfaction of her varying needs. Matthew 20:28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."
5. **A PRIORITY OF THE STRENGTH OF YOUR PRESENCE. A husband who believes his primary ministry is marriage will** You may love your wife by protecting her (Eph. 5:28).
6. **A PRIORITY OF HELPING. A husband who believes his primary ministry is marriage will** express love to his wife by assisting her to fulfill her chores and responsibilities.
7. **A PRIORITY OF SACRIFICE. A husband who believes his primary ministry is marriage will** express his love by sacrificing for her (Eph. 5:25; Phil 2:5,6).
8. **A PRIORITY OF SHARING. A husband who believes his primary ministry is marriage will** love his wife by allowing her really to share your life (1 Pet. 3:7-"heirs together of the grace of life").
9. **A PRIORITY OF LOYALTY. A husband who believes his primary ministry is marriage will** express his love by refusing to compare her unfavorably with other people, especially other women.
10. **A PRIORITY OF HER. A husband who believes his primary ministry is marriage will** express his love by demonstrating to her that, apart from your relationship to Jesus Christ, she has first place in your life.
11. **A PRIORITY OF TENDERNESS. A husband who believes his primary ministry is marriage will** express his love by giving her

a lot of tenderness, respect, chivalry, and courtesy (Eh. 5:28; Col. 3:19; 1 Cor. 13:4, 5). Do not use jokes about her or make cutting remarks to her in front of other people. Speak to her in a gentle and respectful way. Treat her as you would a valuable jewel rather than a piece of cinder or a garbage can.

12. **A PRIORITY OF PRAISING HER. A husband who believes his primary ministry is marriage will** love her by expressing appreciation and praise generously and in large doses (1 Pet. 3:7; Prov. 31:28).

Conclusion. Husbands, God calls you to be your wife's leader and lover. To some extent we have seen what that means. But knowing what it means is of little value unless it is applied to your relationship with your wife. Knowing these facts will not promote oneness in marriage. Performing them will.

I ask you, therefore, to seriously examine your relationship with your wife in the light of these truths. Look back over what we have seen about your responsibility to be your wife's leader and lover.

1. Specifically note areas where you are failing and where you should improve. When you have identified those areas: make confession of your sin to God and to your wife (1 John 1:9; Matt. 5:23, 24; James 5:16).
2. Seek cleansing from this sin and all your sins through the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7).
3. Ask the Holy Spirit for power to be different (Luke 11:13; Gal. 5:16, 22, 23).
4. Move out in obedience to the Word of God, and make the necessary changes (Phil 2:12,13,13; James 1:19-24).

Choice number one: **"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother..."**

God's Mandate for Marriage is to leave our parents. Leaving our parents means that our relationship to our parents must be radically changed. So if this is first, how should our relationship to our parents change?

- o You now relate to them as adults, as friends, and as your honored parents. God picked them for you, put you into their home, and as long as they live you must honor them!
- o You must now choose to value and respond to your mate's plans, goals, ideas, opinions, and practices rather than those of your parents.
- o You must now seek the affection, approval, assistance, and counsel of your mate rather than of your parents.
- o You must choose to repent of any and all bad attitudes towards your parents. If not that spiritual flaw will leave open

a place for the devil to hinder you emotionally regardless of how far you move from them.

- o You must choose to stop trying to change your mate simply because your parents do not like him the way he is.
- o *It means that you make the husband and wife relationship your priority human relationship.* Yes, you should be concerned about being a good son/daughter – or mother/father, but you should be more concerned about being a good husband/wife than about being a good son/daughter or father/mother. *Children do not need indulgent parents who continually neglect each other. They need parents who will demonstrate how to face and solve problems.* They need parents who will show them how to be good husbands and wives; how to relate to other people.

Choice number two: “...and shall cleave to his wife ...”

God’s blueprint for marriage directs husbands and wives to cleave to one another. A good marriage is based more on commitment than feeling or animal attraction.

- o According to Malachi 2: 14 and Proverbs 2: 17, marriage is an irrevocable covenant or contract to which we are bound.
- o Therefore, when two people get married they promise that they will be faithful to each other regardless of what happens.
 1. The wife promises that she will be faithful even if the husband is afflicted with bulges, baldness, bunions, and bifocals; even if he loses his health, his wealth, his job, his charm; even if someone more exciting comes along.
 2. The husband promises to be faithful even if the wife loses her beauty and appeal; even if she is not as neat and tidy or as submissive as he would like her to be; even if she does not satisfy his sexual desires completely; even if she spends money foolishly or is a terrible cook.
 3. Marriage means that a husband and wife enter into a relationship for which they accept full responsibility and in which they commit themselves to each other regardless of what problems arise.

In many ways getting married is like becoming a Christian.

- o When a person becomes a Christian he leaves his former way of life, his self-righteousness, his own efforts to save himself, and turns to Christ, who died in the place and stead of sinners.
- o In this act of turning to Christ, he commits himself to Christ. The very essence of saving faith is personal commitment to

Christ in which a person promises to trust Christ faithfully and completely and to serve Christ faithfully and diligently, regardless of how he feels or what problems arise. (Compare Rom. 10:9, 10; Acts 16:31; Phil. 3:7,8; I Thess. 1:9, 10.)

- o Just so, *God's kind of marriage involves a total and irrevocable commitment of two people to each other.*
 - a. God's kind of marriage involves cleaving to one another in sickness and health, poverty and wealth, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, good times and bad times, agreements and disagreements.

Choice number three: **"...and they shall become one flesh..."**

God's blueprint for marriage involves one flesh. At its most elementary level, this is referring to sexual relations or physical union. Consider I Corinthians 6:16.

Within the bounds of marriage, sexual relations are holy, good, and beautiful, but if they are entered into apart from the "leaving and cleaving" they are ugly, degrading, and sinful. (Study Heb. 13:4.)

The idea of the wife's submission⁴ is not a very popular one in our day. Some resistance to a wife's biblical submission is only a sinful rebellion against the will of God. But sometimes it reflects a wrong understanding of what the biblical wife's submission really involves. To clarify a wife's biblical submission, let me correct the incorrect ideas about submission by showing what biblical submission is not.

1. **BIBLICAL SUBMISSION IS ACTUALLY UNIVERSAL.** *Submission is not merely a concept for women.* It is a concept for all believers. (Compare Eph. 5:21; Phil. 2:3,4; I Pet. 5:5, Rom. 13:1; Heb. 13:17.)
2. **BIBLICAL SUBMISSION IS COMPLETELY LIBERATING.** *Submission does not mean that the wife becomes a slave.* Actually, the wife is never more free than when she is in submission to her husband, for then she is free to become all that God intended her to become. (Study the description of God's ideal wife in Prov. 31:10-31.)
3. **BIBLICAL SUBMISSION PROMOTES COMMUNICATING.** *Submission does not mean that the wife never opens her mouth, never has an opinion, never gives advice.* (Compare Prov. 31:26; Acts 18:26; Judges 13:21-23.)
4. **BIBLICAL SUBMISSION IS MAXIMIZING OUR CALLING.** *Submission does not mean that the wife becomes a wallflower who folds up and*

⁴ From Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, Phillipsburg, NJ, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1977, Page 13-18. (Grateful acknowledgment for the substance of suggestions 13-15 is given to Robert D. Smith, M.D. Dr. Smith has granted permission for their inclusion. He indicates that his remarks are a distillation of concepts taught by Bill Gothard.)

allows her abilities to lie dormant. (Compare the full use that God's ideal wife made of her talents and abilities in Prov. 31.)

5. BIBLICAL SUBMISSION IS ACTUALLY DIVINE. *Submission does not mean that the wife is inferior to the husband,* Jesus Christ was not inferior to Mary and Joseph, and yet the Scripture says that as a child, "He continued in subjection to them" (Luke 2:51). Jesus Christ was in no way inferior to God the Father. He was and is fully and completely God, in every sense. Yet the Scripture asserts that there is order and structure in the Trinity. Jesus said, "I can do nothing on my own initiative, as I hear I judge....I do not seek my own will but the will of Him who sent me" (John 5:30), and Paul declared, "I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman and *God is the head of Christ*" (I Cor. 11:3). Certainly this does not imply that Christ is inferior to God the Father. Rather it teaches that there is a division of labor and responsibility in the Trinity. In like fashion, the submission of the wife in no way implies inferiority. Instead, it teaches the necessity for order and structure, for a division of responsibility within the home. Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:23; and Galatians 3:28 all assert the equalitarian status and dignity of women and men.

So, with the wrong picture of submission deleted, what is a biblical wife's mandate in marriage?

1. BIBLICAL SUBMISSION IS A LIFESTYLE. *Scripture indicates that it is the wife's responsibility to make herself submissive.* Nowhere is the husband commanded to physically force his wife into submission. Rather, the wife is commanded to make herself submissive. (Compare Eph. 5:22 and I Pet. 3:1.) Scripture indicates that the wife's submission is to be continuous. The Greek verb in most passages about submission is in the present tense. Submission is to be the continuous life style of the wife. (Compare Eph. 5:22 and I Pet. 3:1.) Wifely submission is mandatory, not optional. The Greek verb is in the imperative mood. (Compare Eph. 5:21, 22 and I Pet. 3:1.) Her submission is not to be based upon the way her husband treats her. Nor is it to be conditioned by the husband's abilities, talents, wisdom, education, or spiritual state. (Compare I Pet. 3: 1 and Luke 2:51.) Wifely submission is a spiritual matter. It is to be done "as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22). The Lord commands the wife to be submissive. Refusal to submit to the husband is therefore rebellion against God Himself. Submission to the husband is a test of her love for God as well as a test of love for her husband. The wife then must look upon her submission to her husband as an act of obedience to Christ and not merely to her husband. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15), and one of his commands to wives is, "Be subject to your own husbands. .." (Eph. 5:22).

2. **BIBLICAL SUBMISSION IS A WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.** Wifely submission is a spiritual matter because it must be performed in the power of the Holy Spirit. The context in which submission is commanded indicates that it can be performed only by women whose hearts have been cleansed, by the blood of Christ, by women who are being strengthened in the inner man by the Holy Spirit, by women who are being filled up to all fullness of God. (Compare Eph. 1: 1-5: 21; IPet. 1: 1-3: 6.) Submission is a positive, not negative concept. It emphasizes what the wife should do rather than what she should not do. In my opinion, Bill Gothard's definition of submission is right on target. He asserts that submission is "the freedom to be creative under divinely appointed authority."
3. **BIBLICAL SUBMISSION IS STRATEGIC.** Submission means that the wife puts all of her talents, abilities, resources, and energy at her husband's disposal. So now there are two hearts, two minds, twice the strength, twice the endurance, twice the capacity to accomplish **ONE PURPOSE!**
4. **BIBLICAL SUBMISSION IS UNIFYING.** Submission means that the wife yields and uses all of her abilities under the management of her husband for the good of her husband and family – and thus **she sees herself as a part of her husband's team.** She is not her husband's opponent fighting at cross-purposes or trying to outdo him. She is not merely an individual going her separate way. She is her husband's teammate striving for the same goal. She has ideas, opinions, desires, requests, and insights, and she lovingly makes them known. But she knows that on any good team someone has to make the final decisions and plans. She knows that the team members must support the team leader, his plans and decisions, or no progress will be made, and confusion and frustration will result.
5. **BIBLICAL SUBMISSION IS DELIGHTFUL.** Jesus Christ was thoroughly submitted to the Father. He said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work" (John 4: 34). But how did He serve the Father? In a spirit of resignation, servility, or heaviness? No, He served the Father with gladness. He delighted to do the Father's will (Ps. 40: 7,8). So biblical submission involves the wife's attitudes of finding great satisfaction in using all of her God-given resources to fulfill the needs of her husband and family. Ephesians 5: 33 contains a very important injunction concerning the attitude in which a wife should submit to her husband. It says, "Let the wife see to it that she respect her husband." As she submits to her husband, she is to do so with respectful attitude. What this means is clarified by the Amplified Version of the New Testament when it asserts that the wife is to notice, regard, honor, prefer, esteem, praise, and admire her husband exceedingly.
6. **BIBLICAL SUBMISSION IS COMPLETE.** Wifely submission is to be extensive. She is to be subject unto her husband as the church is to Christ (Eph. 5: 24). And how broad should the submission of the church be to Christ? Well, the submission of the church to Christ is

to be total; it is to be comprehensive. Christ is "head over all things for the church" (Eph. 1:22), and the church is to do whatever it does in word or deed in the name of the Lord Jesus, in total dependence upon His person, acknowledging and recognizing Him in all its ways, doing all for His honor and glory (Col. 3:17; Prov. 3:5,6; I Cor. 10:31). In like fashion Paul says, "the wives are to be subject to their husbands in everything." The wife's submission to her husband then is to be extensive but not necessarily total or unlimited. She is to obey him in everything except that which contradicts the Word of God. And even then she is to disobey in a loving, submissive fashion, explaining calmly and clearly her reasons for disobedience, assuring her husband of her love and loyalty, and seeking to demonstrate that love and loyalty in a variety of continuous and tangible ways. She is to be her husband's helper (Gen. 2:18), and this she can never be if she manifests a contentious, inconsiderate, uncooperative spirit.

7. **BIBLICAL SUBMISSION IS LIFE LONG.** Submission is not to be an on-again off-again matter for the wife. Nor is it to be a selective, choose what you like, reject what you do not like proposition. Submission is to be her life style at all times, in all places, and in everything. Certainly this does not mean that she must obey her husband when he commands her to do what God forbids or tries to keep her from doing what God commands. She is to be subject to her husband "as is fitting in the Lord" (Col. 3:18). Her husband's authority is a delegated or ministerial authority. He has authority because he is under the authority of God. As long as he does not ask her to do what God forbids or forbids her from doing what God commands, she is to submit. Failure to do so would be rebellion against God as well as her husband. However, since her husband's authority is delegated to him, he loses his authority at those times and in those areas when his directives are clearly contrary to the revealed will of God as it is found in the Bible. When the husband asks her to do that which is unmistakably contrary to the Word of God, the wife must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:28-29).

Wives, God calls you to be in submission to your husband, to be his unique and suitable helper. To some extent in this unit we have seen what that means. But knowing what it means is of little value, unless it is applied to your relationship with your husband. Knowing these facts will not promote oneness in marriage. Performing them will. I ask you wives to examine your relationship to your husbands in the light of these truths.

1. Are you really practicing submission to your husband?
2. Are you really his helper?
3. I suggest that where you find yourself to be failing: Make confession of your sin to God and your husband. Seek cleansing from this sin and all your sins through the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7; 1 John 1:9). Ask the Holy Spirit for power to be different (Gal.

5:16, 22, 23). Move out in obedience to the Word of God, and make the necessary changes (Phil. 2:12, 13; James 1:19-24).

THE WIFE'S MANDATE

So how can we as wives love our husbands with Christ's love? Here are just a few ideas. **A wife who believes her primary ministry is marriage will CHOOSE TO HAVE:**

- 1. A PRIORITY OF THE IRRESISTABLE HOME.**
- 2. A PRIORITY OF REVERENCE.**
- 3. A PRIORITY OF CHEERFULNESS**
- 4. A PRIORITY OF COMMUNICATION.**
- 5. A PRIORITY OF CONTENTMENT.**
- 6. A PRIORITY OF PATIENCE.**
- 7. A PRIORITY OF CARING.**
- 8. A PRIORITY OF INDUSTRIOUSNESS.**
- 9. A PRIORITY OF HELPFULNESS.**
- 10. A PRIORITY OF BEAUTY.**
- 11. A PRIORITY OF DEVOTION.**
- 12. A PRIORITY OF AGREEMENT.**
- 13. A PRIORITY OF LOYALTY.**
- 14. A PRIORITY OF GRATITUDE.**
- 15. A PRIORITY OF CONFIDENCE.**

THE HUSBAND'S MANDATE

There are, of course, many passages in the Bible, which speak of the man's part in marriage. Some of the key passages are Genesis 3: 16; Ephesians 5: 23-33; 1 Timothy 3: 4,5; Psalm 128; 1 Peter 3: 7; 1 Corinthians 7: 3,4; Proverbs 5: 15-19; Colossians 3: 19.

So how can we as husbands love our wives with Christ's love? Here are just a few ideas. **A husband who believes his primary ministry is marriage will CHOOSE TO HAVE:**

1. **A PRIORITY OF HUMILITY.**
2. **A PRIORITY OF SERVANTHOOD.**
3. **A PRIORITY OF KIND WORDS.**
4. **A PRIORITY OF KIND DEEDS.**
5. **A PRIORITY OF YOUR PRESENCE.**
6. **A PRIORITY OF HELPING.**
7. **A PRIORITY OF SACRIFICE.**
8. **A PRIORITY OF SHARING.**
9. **A PRIORITY OF LOYALTY.**
10. **A PRIORITY OF HER.**
11. **A PRIORITY OF TENDERNESS.**
12. **A PRIORITY OF PRAISING HER.**