

Aug. 23, 2020

New Attitudes for Old Relationships

A Wife's Submission

Colossians 3:18-4:1

Christians proclaim the preeminence of Christ to the world by how we follow and lead.

LTS: Eph. 6:6-9

Before we begin this morning, let's take a moment to read the text I intended to preach this morning.

Read Col. 3:18-4:1

Clearly, Paul is continuing his call to change in the Christian life. We have learned that the gospel brings us NOT only a new relationship with Jesus, but a new relationship to Sin and a new relationship with Virtue. The text we just read, then, calls for a change in how we relate to the people that interact with most closely; namely, our family members and the those with whom we share a common work life.

You will see in your bulletin a three-point outline that reflects this flow of thought. But it occurred to me after I sent it over to be printed, that since we find ourselves kind of pushing the reset on church after sending our latest Plant on their way, it might be a good time to linger over the important topics that our text for this morning only mentions. So, for the next few weeks I want to preach a series of messages on these very practical issues; namely, A Wife's submission. A husband's leadership. Some iteration of biblical parenting, and finally, a message on Taking the Gospel to Work. Today, then, I want us to narrow our focus by addressing the issue Paul mentions first: A wife's submission.

For nearly as long as there have been male and female humans on the earth there has been what we might call "gender warfare." In my early years I remember it being commonly known as the battle of the sexes. Throughout the ages, MEN have sought dominance and power over women, and WOMEN have sought to be liberated from male oppression; hence, the "women's liberation" movement which exists in modernized forms today.

It would be beneficial at this point to have you turn with me to Genesis chapter 3.

In the beginning, however, it was not this way. The book of Genesis tells us that God created man out of the dust of the ground and stamped him with God's own image. He then created a woman out of the body of the man to be his helper. She too bore the image and likeness of God and was EQUAL with her husband in value, intellect, creativity, and moral capacity. In fact, the Genesis account affirms this equality when it says (Gen. 1:27)

- "God created man in His own image,
- in the image of God He created him;
- male and female he created them

What we learn here is that both men and women display the glory of God's image with equal brilliance... This is consistent with God's intention, stated in v. 26 where He says, "and let them rule..."

Nevertheless, while the man and woman were created as equal in value and purpose, there can be no doubt that there are intended differences. Men and women are different by design. And these differences reflect the unique roles God has established for men and women as they relate to one another in the church and in the home. As in any established institution someone has to lead and others have to follow, otherwise there is disorder and chaos (which is exactly what we are seeing in our society today). In the case of the original couple (Adam and Eve) the man was to lead and his wife was to serve as his helper.

As you know, this perfect arrangement worked beautifully in the garden of Eden... for a while. We know there was perfect trust and unity because God says (2:28) "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." But all of that was to change when Satan inserted himself into their relationship. Appealing to Eve's God-given appetites, the Serpent enticed her to doubt God's word and character. Genesis 3:6

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

We don't have time to unpack all that was going on there in the Genesis account. But what I want to highlight is the change that occurred between the man and woman when sin intruded into their relationship.

(Read Gen. 3:8-13)

Genesis 3:8–13

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” ¹¹ He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹² The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

After this, God curses the serpent (14-15) and then He talks to the woman about the consequences of her sin. We read in v.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 for your husband, but he shall rule over you.”

Now what does He mean when He says, “Your desire will be for your husband.” Well, many of you already know that the same word for “desire” is used again in the very next chapter. The Lord is warning Cain about the temptation to harm his brother and he says (4:7), Sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

In other words, sin desires to master you; to rule you; to control and undermine you...” In the same way, now that sin has entered her heart, Eve will discover within herself the natural inclination to undermine her husband’s authority to get what she wants. And of course, his response will be to sinfully tighten his grip of authority and control over her.

Ladies and gentlemen, Behold the original battle of the sexes. Where there had been perfect peace and unity there is now guilt, hostility, and blame shifting. Here lies the core of all relational problems between men and women.

The amazing thing, however, is that the gospel of Jesus Christ (by the Spirit and the word) offers us the power to restore this broken relationship between men and women (and all Christian relationships for that matter). In Christ, we now have restored capacity to image forth the glory of God in relationships of joy-filled, mutually satisfying, Christ-exalting, gospel-saturated authority and submission in male and female relationships. Paradise lost can be paradise regained and restored!

I think you have a blank page in your bulletin, so here is the new outline.

I. The Purpose of Marriage

II. The Practice of Submission

Let's shift gears a little here and turned to Paul's N.T. letter to the Ephesians.

Read Ephesians 5:22-33

Here Paul offers us a beautiful exposition of God's purpose for marriage.

1. The great fallacy of our day as it relates to marriage is that marriage is First and Foremost about personal fulfillment. But that is not what was in God's mind when He created marriage. Rather, God created marriage to be a parable of Christ's relationship to His church. We see this all through this text.

- A. (23) The husband is head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church.
- B. (24) As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.
- C. (25) Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.
- D. (29) No one ever hated his own body but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church.
- E. (32) This mystery is profound and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

2. This is important because it tells us what the established roles in marriage are supposed to accomplish; Namely, to set on physical and visible display the glory of Christ's relationship with His Bride, the church. Being created in the image of God means that we were made to show the world what God is like. And this is the mystery Paul refers to in v. 32; that God did NOT create union of Christ and His church as a reflection of human marriage – quite the reverse! He created marriage to reflect the glory of Christ and his church.¹

3. You see, beloved, this is why there are established roles in marriage. Elaborating on Paul's meaning, John Piper explains:

The inference Paul draws from this mystery is that the roles of husband and wife in marriage are NOT arbitrarily assigned but are

¹ John Piper, *Desiring God*, (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), 213

rooted in the distinctive roles of Christ and His church. Those of us who are married need to ponder again and again how mysterious and wonderful it is that God grants us in marriage the privilege to image forth stupendous divine realities infinitely bigger and greater than ourselves.²

4. You see, beloved? Jesus is glorified by the magnificent reality of his marriage to the church. But the world can't see that. It's too big, and too other-worldly, and too abstract, too mysterious – even foolish in their eyes. Therefore, God has ordained that his glory be clearly on display before them whenever they happen to get a glimpse of a Christian marriage. **Ladies**, people ought to be able to look at how you relate to your husband and say, “Wow, that is really something. She loves her husband in ways that I have rarely (if ever) seen! I wish I had a marriage like that. Maybe her God really is someone I should get to know.”

5. We believe, therefore, that the Bible teaches that the husband is to model the loving, sacrificial leadership of Christ, and the wife is to model the glad submission offered freely to Christ by the church.”

6. And by the way, in verse 23 (Eph. 5) Paul points out that Christ is not only the Head of the church, He is also her Savior. Now I don't think he is saying that the husband is in some way the wife's savior.

Rather, I think Paul is just pointing out that even Jesus who was the head, took on the role of a servant. Throughout eternity past, the Son always subordinated himself to the Father. That's submission. And even as the head of the church, He ranked Himself under the church serving her to save her.

3. I think Paul is telling wives, “Listen, this is a command of Christ. But He is NOT commanding you to do anything He was unwilling willing to do to the extreme! His role as Servant was a glorious role. In fact, Paul tells us, “For this reason God highly exalted Him and has given Him a name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow of things in heaven, and things on earth and things under the earth; and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father” (Phil. 2:10-11). Why? According to that passage, Jesus humbled himself to the role of a servant.

4. When the church submits to Christ she is only responding to the Lord in kind, and it is a beautiful thing. That's the high calling of every Christian wife; To serve as a living, breathing model of the church which takes its cues from the model of Christ Himself.

² Ibid.

5. This is God's purpose of Marriage. It was designed to reflect the glory of Christ's relationship to his church.

II. The Practice of Submission:

1. In Colossians 1:18 Paul simply says, "Wives submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. The parallel passage (Eph. 5:22), reads, "Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. But what is submission? Again, John Piper and Wayne Grudem offer a helpful definition:

Submission" refers to a wife's divine calling to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help him carry it through according to her gifts.³ As God said when he created woman, she is "his suitable helper."

2. The GK Word for "be submissive" in the Bible NEVER means "mutual submission" between a husband and wife. It always means to submit to an authority. Grudem points out that "in every example we find, when person A is said to be subject to person B, person B has a unique authority which person A does not have. Examples in the NT include:⁴

- Jesus was subject to his parents (Luke 2:51)
- Citizens subject to government (Romans 13:1)
- Demons were subject to the disciples (Luke 10:17)
- The Universe is subject to Christ (1 Cor. 15:27)
- The Church is subject to Christ (Eph. 5:24)
- Believers subject to God (James 4:7)
- Christ subject to the Father (1 Cor. 15:28)
- Wives submit to husbands (Eph. 5:23)

³ Ibid, 61

⁴ Alexander Strauch, *Men and Women Equal yet Different*, (Littleton Colorado, Lewis and Roth, 1999), 44-45

3. What does it mean for a Christian wife to be submissive? Or more practically, What does a wife's submission look like in the home? Let me offer several thoughts.

A. Submission is not an absolute surrender of her will. Rather, it is a disposition to yield to her husband's authority and an inclination to follow his leadership.

- This is important because no submission of one human being to another is absolute. The husband does not replace Christ as the woman's supreme authority. She must never follow her husband's leadership into sin. That is, she will not steal with him, or get drunk with him, or savor pornography with him or develop deceptive schemes with him.⁵
- Remember, the wife's loyalty is first of all to Christ not her husband. Nevertheless, she must be careful never to use that principle as a pretense merely to get her own way.
- But even where a Christian wife may have to stand with Christ against the sinful will of her husband, she can still have a spirit of submission – a disposition to yield. She can show by her attitude and behavior that she does not like resisting his will and longs for him to forsake sin and lead [her] in righteousness so that her disposition to honor him as head can again produce harmony.”⁶
- Additionally, her disposition toward submission should not be confused with requirement to submit to abuse. Ladies, your husband has been granted authority in the home, but it is a limited, delegated authority. When he uses that authority to justify being abusive, his wife should appeal to the other spiritual authorities in her life; namely, the elders of her church. “Male domination (as we will see next time) is a personal moral failure and needs to be addressed by the spiritual authorities in that man's life.

B. Submission communicates respectfully:

- Piper suggests that,
when a woman addresses her husband personally and directly with an ere of superiority, it almost invariably

⁵ Ibid, 47

⁶ Ibid, 47

offends and provokes him either to shut down or to fight for his dignity. Non-directive influence, however, takes the form of petition (gracious questions) and persuasion (calm, humble reasoning) rather than instructing, commanding, or threatening.⁷

- A beautiful example of this comes from the OT story of Abigail who talked David out of killing her good-for-nothing husband, Nabal (1 Sam. 25:23-35). She exerted great influence over David and changed the course of his life; but she did it with amazing restraint, submissiveness, and discretion.
- The apostle Peter calls for the same approach from wives when he exhorts them on how to influence their husbands. He writes (1 Pet. 3:1-2) “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.”

C. Submission is Prayerful:

- One of the most powerful ways to influence your husband is through faithful prayer. James says “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person avails much” (Jam. 5:16).

D. Submission Treasures Children and Home

- In his letter to Titus Paul instructs older, more mature wives to encourage younger wives to love their husbands and children; to be sensible, kind, and pure; to be homemakers; and to be submissive to their husbands (Tit. 2:3-5). This passage represents the most succinct summary of a woman’s core roles in the home. This is what defines the term helper in Genesis 2:18.
- Alexander Strauch further explains that:

⁷ John Piper & Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 1991), 51-52

“A “core role” is not everything a woman does in marriage. She is not confined only to what Paul describes here. But she dare not excuse herself from these responsibilities or neglect them for other ambitions. Like the planets around the sun, everything in marriage should revolve around these crucial “core role” responsibilities and concerns. A wife’s core role should prioritize her commitments and her use of energy and time. It should keep her from missing out on what God has called her to do”⁸ and what He has promised to bless her through”.

8. Far from restricting a woman’s life, this disposition of godly submission is experienced by Christian wives as freeing – especially when her husband gets in the game and begins leading as he should. And we will talk about that next time.

Gospel Hope: This is why Jesus came to die!

⁸ Alexander Strauch, *Men and Women Equal yet Different*, (Littleton Colorado, Lewis and Roth, 1999), 66