

## FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

Reading: Ephesians 5:15-24

### 3. WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF A WIFE ?

*“ When home is ruled according to God’s Word,”* said Charles Spurgeon *“ angels might be asked to stay with us and they would not find themselves out of their element.”* The trouble is that many homes are not governed by God’s Word, even homes where the members are professing Christians, and the consequences are tragic. Instead of angels being guests in some homes, it seems that demons are the masters. Too many marriages end in the divorce court, and nobody really knows how many husbands and wives are really divorced even though they share the same address. The poet William Cowper called the home *“ the only bliss of Paradise that hast survived the Fall,”* but too many homes are an outpost of hell instead of a parcel of paradise. The answer is the Holy Spirit of God. For it is only through the power of the Spirit that we can walk in harmony as husbands and wives, parents and children. *“ Be filled with the Spirit,”* is God’s command and He expects us to obey. You see, the filling and controlling of the Spirit of God is the key to a successful marriage. So many begin marriage with great expectation, but often it’s not long before the expectation is replaced with frustration.

The marriage which they were sure was made in heaven comes crashing to the earth, the stars in their eyes become sand, the delight becomes disillusionment. Every year millions of couples pledge themselves in marriage vowing to be faithful to each other, for better or worse, but half of those marriages may end up in divorce. We have a generation of children growing in families that are in chaos. Many children are saying to themselves *“ the last thing I want to do is to get married.”* They have lived in chaotic and unfulfilled families so they don’t want anything to do with marriage. But they want to fulfill their sex drives so they go from person to person with no commitment. Now when Paul began to teach about the divine standards for marriage, the situation was much the same as it is today. Think of the three major groups in Paul’s day. There were,

#### 1. THE JEWS:

They had developed a low view of women. To them women were servants. In fact when a Jewish man would get up in the morning he would pray, *“ God I thank Thee that I am not a Gentile, a slave or a woman.”* Divorce had long been common. In ( Deut Ch 24:1 ) Moses says that if a husband found uncleanness in his wife he could divorce her. Of course everything hinged on what *“ uncleanness,”* meant. One Rabbi said that *“ uncleanness,”* meant adultery. But another Rabbi said, *“ uncleanness,”* could be anything. Rabbi Hillel taught that a wife was unclean if she spoiled her husband’s dinner, or put too much salt on it. If she talked with men on the street, or said something against her mother in law that was enough. Rabbi Akiba

insisted that if a man found a woman who was prettier than his wife, the latter became unclean in his eyes. He could write her a bill of divorce send her out and marry the pretty one. Now when these two options were offered to the Jews for ending a marriage, adultery on the one hand or anything on the other hand, what do you think they accepted ? The second one. So by the time of the Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul the Jews were divorcing their wives almost at will.

## **2. THE GREEKS:**

Were even worse. In fact scholars tell us that there was no legal procedure for divorce in Greek society since wives were simply the ones who cleaned the house and bore legitimate children. Men found their physical enjoyment outside of marriage so they didn't bother to divorce their wives. One Athenian orator said, “ *we have prostitutes for the sake of pleasure, we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation, and we have wives for purpose of having children legitimately and being faithful guardians for our household affairs.*” Historians tell us that this society was dominated by homosexuality, lesbianism and the sexual abuse of children.

## **3. THE ROMANS:**

Were worse than that. Divorce was not the exception it was the norm. Jerome an ancient writer tells of one Roman woman who married her twenty third husband, and she was his twenty first wife. You just married when you found someone you wanted, stayed until you got tired

of her, dumped her and then married someone else. Rome had also a rampant women's liberation movement. Women did not want to have children, because they thought it spoiled the appearance of their bodies. Some women wanted to do everything men did. So there were women wrestlers, fencers, sword throwers and so on. Some liked to run bare-breasted while hunting pigs. Women began to lord it over men and even took the initiative in getting a divorce. Now this was the condition of marriage when Paul said, “ *Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord .... husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it.*” ( 5:25 ) Paul was calling them to a new standard of living that was completely different to their past. He was calling them to live in total contrast to the corrupt, vile, self-centered and immoral standards of those around them.

The relationship between husband and wife was to be based on that between Christ and His church. That means, when two people know, accept, fulfill their varying but complementary roles oneness of marriage is promoted. On other hand when husband and wife either don't understand or will not fulfill their God given responsibilities confusion and frustration will result. *Now what is the Biblical role of the wife ? What is the wife expected to do ?* When during the marriage ceremony she says, “ *I will,*” what has she as a wife undertaken to do ? Now in seeking to break down this subject and make it as clear as possible I want to underscore three things. There is,

## (1) A DISTINCTION WE MUST MAKE

Now every time we think about husbands and wives we must distinguish between their position as individuals before God and their role within the structure of the home. Now if you do not distinguish between these two things the result will be confusion. In other words we must distinguish between what they are spiritually and what they are functionally. I mean how can you reconcile ( Eph 5:22 ) which says, “ *Wives submit yourselves unto your husbands,*” with ( Gal 3:28 ) which says, “ *there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus,*” how can you reconcile those two Scriptures if you don’t distinguish between their position as individuals before God and their role within the structure of the family. Spiritually, there is an equality about them, but once you look at them as members of the family unit there is distinct position and responsibility.

Now Scripture indicates that there are at least three areas where there is absolute equality and identity between husband and wife. In other words, every single believer male or female, parent or child stands on an entirely equal plane with all of his fellow Christians in at least three areas.

### (a) CREATIVE DIGNITY:

That is, there is an equality and identity between husbands and wives as creatures made in the image of God. You Eve was as much made in the image of God as Adam.

( Gen 1:26-27 ) They both were bearers of God’s image, that is they were both made with a capacity to know God, to fellowship with God and to return to God, homage, worship and obedience. (a)

### (b) NATIVE DEPRAVITY:

Do you recall the account of the Fall ? ( Gen 3:6 ) Eve sinned and Adam followed and the whole human race fell in them, without distinction of sex. Paul says, “ *Wherefore as one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*” ( Rom 5:12 ) Paul again says, “ *There is none righteous no not one.*” ( Rom 3:10 ) Male and female are equally depraved and corrupt. So there is an equality and identity in the area of Creative Dignity, Native Depravity and,

### (c) REDEMPTIVE BLESSING:

Look if you will at ( Gal 3:28 ) You see, there is no sexual distinction in the realm of redemption. So any idea that the woman should be degraded because of some inferiority in creation or redemption is to be totally rejected because such an idea is not Biblical. *So in these three areas of Creative Dignity: Native Depravity: and Redemptive Blessing there is an equality and identity between husband and wife.* But, the moment you contemplate them as members of the family, there is distinct position and responsibility. In other words we must distinguish between what they are spiritually and what they are functionally. Now its just this that the

feminist movements like Women's Liberation fail to recognize. They say since women have equal dignity and intelligence why should they not have equality in every relationship. So, in some Scandinavian countries the roles have been reversed. Husbands stay at home and look after the children while the wives are the bread winners. "*Why not,*" they say, "*since we have the same standing before God, why not have equality in the home ?*" For the simple reason that the same God who has revealed areas of equality and identity has also revealed areas of difference and distinct responsibility. So there is (1)

## (2) A DUTY WE MUST MENTION

What is the wife's primary duty and responsibility in marriage ? Submission. Let's look for a moment at 5 key passages which speak of the wife's part in marriage... ( 1 Cor 11:1-3, Eph 5:22-24 v33, 1 Tim 2:9-15 Titus 2:1-5, 1 Pet 3:1-6 ) Tell me, what word occurred more often in all of these passages ? What was the key word ? Submit, or subjection. Now when we think of submission and authority we think of three great institutions. We think of,

- **THE GOVERNMENT:**

In government we have both authority and submission. Now those in authority are not necessarily godly people. You may ask, "*Why aren't the spiritual leaders the ones in authority in government ?*" Well, Paul says, "*the powers that be are ordained of God.*" ( Rom 13:1 ) Peter says, "*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for*

*the Lord's sake.*" ( 1 Pet 2:13 ) Why ? Because God knows society is maintained on the basis of authority and submission. So on the one hand there will be kings, rulers, leaders, and on the other hand there will be those who follow their leadership. Why ? Because they are better than everyone else. No. Because there has to be authority and submission, or there will be anarchy.

- **THE CHURCH:**

We have to have authority and submission in the church. Men are to teach in the church. Why ? Because that is how God designed it. We have already these words, "*But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.*" ( 1 Tim 2:12 ) Does that mean that women are inferior ? Of course not. The Old Testament as well as the New Testament shows us many examples of godly women. Women have touched the globe in a way that men never could. But there has to be some order in the church, so God has designed men to be the strength, force, and leadership of the church.

- **THE FAMILY:**

You see, you cannot have anarchy in the home with no responsible for discipline, for earning wages or for giving direction. That would bring nothing but chaos, so God has designed that in the family, for the sake of function that the woman is to be submit to the leadership of the man. Its not a matter of who's better, this is way that God has designed it. "*Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord.*" ( 5:22 ) Maybe you are

saying, “ *Hold on, do you mean to say that as late a date in the world’s history, you’re going to trot out these old words of Peter and Paul ? Do you mean to tell us in this day of “ Women’s Lib,” you would dare talk to us women like that ? We live in modern Britain, you can’t really mean what you seem to be saying can you ?*” Yes, I do. For was Paul and Peter not writing under the inspiration of God. My .... This is God’s Word, God’s plan for a happy and fulfilling home. Now lets break it down further and notice,

**(a) *THE MEANING OF THIS SUBMISSION:***

Look at ( 5:22 ) The common word used for “ *submit*,” in the New Testament describes a relationship of subordination of someone to someone else. The Greek word ( *hypotasso* ) means “ *a lining up underneath.*” In the military sense it means “ *to rank beneath,*” or “ *to rank under.*” Alexander Strauch says “ *in the context of the husband wife relationship, the word submission ( *hypotasso* ) means “ *to submit to,*” “ *be subject to,*” “ *be subordinate to.*” The New Testament never says the husband is to submit to the wife, it is always the reverse. The term itself does not suggest mutual submission. So in the family for the sake of function the woman is to take the place of submission to the leadership of the man. Now this concept of submission is illustrated in the life of Christ. ( Lk 2:51 ) Now was Jesus Christ the eternal Son of the living God ? Was He as much God when He was a boy as when He was a full grown man ? Yes. Why the Scriptures say “ *He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest.*” ( Lk 1:32 )*

Do you recall Gabriel’s words to Mary ? “ *That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*” ( Lk 1:35 ) This was the Eternal Word made flesh yet He went down to Nazareth and submitted Himself to Joseph and Mary. Now does that effect in any way His inherent worth and dignity as the Son of God ? Never. Rather its referring to His position within the structure of the home. It was not demeaning to the dignity of the Son of God to be submissive to Joseph and Mary. Submission did not mean a demeaning of His person. Now when women grasp this it should mean total liberation. Christ was not inferior to Joseph and Mary yet He went down to Nazareth and “ *was subject unto them.*” Wives submission does not mean that,

- That the wife becomes a slave, standing in the centre of the room awaiting commands. “ *Do this,*” “ *Get that,*” “ *Go there,*”
- That the wife becomes a wallflower who folds up and allows her talents to lie dormant. ( Pr 31:10 )
- That the wife never opens her mouth. ( Prov 31:26 )
- That the wife is inferior. That she is something half way between a human and an animal.

No, no. The Lord Jesus gave Himself up to the directions of those whom God had set over Him. Now was He wiser than Joseph and Mary ? Well “ *in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*” ( Col 2:9 ) Paul says “ *In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*” ( Col 2:3 ) But He was “ *subject unto them.*” So its not a matter of whether the wife is better educated than her husband, whether she has more gray matter, a

higher I.Q. whether she is more traveled or cultured. It has nothing to do with any of those factors. “ *Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands ....*,” because God has ordained the structure of the home. Just as Christ became subject to Joseph and Mary. My .... the Lord made Joseph and Mary, yet He was subject to them. Subject to the very people He made. So to be subject means nothing more or less than willingly to take the place of submissiveness to your husband’s authority. “ *Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands,*” “ *But you don’t my husband, you don’t know the way He treats me, you don’t understand my problems.*” No, but I can read plain English from the Bible. “ *Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands.*” Have you obeyed this command of God ? Are you obeying it ? Are you continuously submissive to your husband ?

### ***(b) THE NATURE OF THIS SUBMISSION:***

#### **1. It is Voluntary:**

Now in saying that this submission is voluntary we are not saying that it is optional, for God has commanded it. Scholars tell us that the Greek verb here is in the imperative mood. “ *Wives willingly with delight submit yourselves unto your own husbands.*” Wives, do you love the Lord Jesus ? Well, Christ says, “ *If ye love me keep my commandments.*” ( Jn 14:15, 23 ) You see, if you love Christ you then you’ll willingly submit yourself to your husband. “ *But I am better educated, I have a sharper mind, I come from a better family, I have more talents than my husband, moreover I am walking closer with the*

*Lord.*” My .... it has got nothing to do with that. Paul does not say “ *Wives submit yourselves unto your husbands, if you find they are more intelligent, more qualified, more capable.*” No. Do you tell me that you love the Lord and yet you are not submissive to your own husband ? Well, then listen to what Christ says, “ *Why call ye me, Lord, Lord and do not the things which I say.*” ( Lk 6:46 ) “ *But my husband is not saved.*” Well, have a look at ( 1 Pet 3:1-2 ) You see, Peter is talking here about wives who have recently been saved. He is not dealing with a Christian wife marrying an unsaved man, rather he is talking about wives who had come to know Christ as their Saviour and their husbands were still unsaved.

Now in a culture in which women were viewed as lower than men, the potential for conflict and embarrassment in the marriage of a believer and unbeliever were significant, even as it in contemporary society. Peter did not urge the Christian wife to leave her husband ( 1 Cor 7:13-16 ) to preach to her husband ( without the word ) or to demand her rights ( be in subjection ) My .... the loving gracious submission of a Christian woman to her unsaved husband is the greatest evangelistic tool she has. 1.

#### **2. It is Limited:**

Do you see this ? “ *Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands.*” Now this is a word of emphasis in the original. If you compare the three parallel passages where the duty of wives is brought before us you’ll find the same emphasis. ( Col 3:18 Titus 2:5 1 Pet 3:1 ) It simply means

that wives are to be in subjection to the husband who is peculiarly their own. 1, 2,

### 3. It is Spiritual:

Wifely submission is a spiritual matter, for it is done “*as unto the Lord.*” ( 5:22 ) That is, as part of her obedience to Him, the very Saviour who died for her. That means that when my wife obeys me, she is at the same time rendering obedience to the Lord. To state it negatively, refusal to submit to your husband is rebellion against God Himself. You see, submission to your husband is not only a test of your love for Him, it is a test of your love for God. Here’s a little girl in the home. How does this precious child in the home learn what is the role of a wife ? Well, the greatest influence is her mother’s daily acceptance of her God given role. Tell me, as wife in the home are you presenting your Biblical role to your family ?

### 4. It is Positive:

For it emphasizes what the wife should do, rather than what she should not do. Bill Gothard’s defines submission this way. He says that “***submission is the freedom to be creative under divinely appointed authority.***” That means that wife puts all her abilities, talents, energy at her husband’s disposal. She sees herself as part of her husband’s team. She is not going her own separate way. She is striving for the same goal. Sure, she has ideas, and insights of her own. But she knows that on any good team

someone has to make the final decision and plans, so positively she supports her team leader. (b)

### **(c) *THE REASON FOR THIS SUBMISSION:***

Look if you will at ( 5:22-23 ) Paul is giving a reason here and the reason for submission is that God has constituted it so. “*The husband is the head of the wife,*” he does not explain it, defend it, or debate it, he states it. Paul says “*that’s the way it is and ever shall be.*” “*The husband is the head of the wife.*” Now this structure of God’s breaks down into two specifics.

#### **1. There is the Creative Order:**

Lets look at ( Gen 2:15-23 ) Now the whole drift of this passage indicates that man would lead and rule. Adam was to dress the garden, he was to name the animals. “*But for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.*” ( Gen 2:20 ) That is, one answering to Adam. You see, amidst all the creatures in the garden, there was nothing that answered to Adam’s needs. No beast with whom he could hold intellectual fellowship, social fellowship and physical fellowship. So what did God do ? ( 2:21-23 ) You see, the man was created first, and then the woman and Paul picks up this order in ( 1 Cor 11:8-9 ) In other words she was created on his account, to answer to his needs, to complement him. So from the very beginning God designed someone to be in charge and someone to help, someone to be in authority and someone to submit to that authority. From the very beginning the man had the place of headship and the woman was the one

who for whom that headship was provided. Someone has said, “*the tendency to follow was embedded in Eve’s soul as she came forth from the hand of her Creator.*” You see, if you don’t submit you are fighting against God’s creative order. 1.

## **2. There is the Redemptive Pattern:**

Look at ( 5:23 ) Here are two relationships. The church and Christ, the wife and husband. Now what is the relationship between the church and Christ ? One of loving submission to the head and bridegroom the Lord Jesus. “ *Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands.* ” ( 5:24 ) You see, the church is set forth as an example for wives to be submissive. Now do you see what happens when you as a wife are not submissive to your husband ? You misrepresent the whole relationship of the church and Christ, for the relationship of husband and wife is to be a little picture of that greater relationship between Christ and His church. (a) (b) (c)

### **(d) THE EXTENT OF THIS SUBMISSION:**

Look if you will at ( 5:24 ) Does Paul “ *in every area where it is convenient,* ” ? Does he say, “ *in 95% of things ?* ” Is that in your Bible ? What it says in my Bible is, “ *in every thing.* ” Submission is not to be an on again off again matter for the wife. Nor is it to be selective, choose what you like, reject what you like. Submission is to be her lifestyle at all times, in all places, and in all things. Why ? Because the church is subject unto Christ

in how many areas if it’s the true church ? In its entire life. So the wife is to be subject to her husband “ in every thing.” Now this does not mean that,

- The husband does not discuss things with his wife ( Eph 4:29 )
- That the wife never has an opinion, never gives advice ( Prov 31:26 Acts 18:26 )
- That she allows her abilities to lie dormant. ( Prov 31:10 )

But it does mean that when a husband makes a decision as the appointed head of his home, his wife gladly submits. “ *In every thing,* ” the only qualification is where a husband would demand something of his wife that would mean a clear violation of Scripture. If he commands her to do something which God forbids or forbids her to do something which God commands, then the wife must obey God rather than man. ( Acts 5:28-29 ) “ *But even then,* ” says Wayne Mack “ *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.* ”

Wives, God calls you to be submissive to your own husbands. Perhaps you’re saying, “ *I’ve never really considered this before, I have never felt the full impact of this until now, how can I do this ?* ” The context makes it clear that it can only be accomplished by wives whose



hearts are cleansed by the blood ( 1:7 ) and controlled by the Spirit. ( 5:18 ) (1) (2)

### (3) A DESCRIPTION WE MUST MARK

Would you turn to ( Prov Ch 31 ) in closing. Here there is set before wives an example to be followed. What is this ideal wife like ? Well, the word “ *virtuous*,” in ( 31:10 ) is an interesting word. Literally the original reads “ *a woman of many parts*.” Now the writer is going to take her apart and look at each part of this remarkable woman. She has many sides to her personality, she has many gifts that have been developed and are working well. She leads a full, meaningful, productive life. She is

(a) **Trustworthy:** ( 31:10 )

(b) **Helpful:** ( 31:12 )

(c) **Industrious:** ( 31:13 )

(d) **Content:** ( 31:13 )

(e) **Able:** ( 31:16 )

(f) **Kind:** ( 31:20 )

(g) **Prepared:** ( 31:21 )

(h) **Interested:** ( 31:23 )

(i) **Wise:** ( 31:26 )

(j) **Co-operative:** ( 31:28 )

(k) **Spiritual:** ( 31:30 )

How do you as a wife match up to the ideal woman ?

(1) (2) (3) Dr. Albert Martin whose studies on the family have been a blessing to me over the years draws several conclusions from the wife’s role in the home.

**1. Can you see wives that is sinfulness for you to refuse the place of submission to your husband regardless of the bad example your husband with all his weakness might be.** ( 1 Pet 3:1 ) The lack of domestic stability in our nation is in some measure due to the fact that women have lost the glory of their Biblical role. Is this not why so many girls have problems adjusting to their role as wives ? Because they didn’t see an example in the home.

**2. Young people, young ladies, when you feel your getting all bubbly and starry eyed about some boy that crosses your pathway.** When your feet have hit the ground I want you to ask a simple question. “ *Is he the kind of man to whom I can submit myself and believe that it will be for my good ?*” If he isn’t I don’t care how handsome he is, smart he is, smooth he is, intelligent he is. If you cannot submit yourself to him in the way I have described don’t marry him for if you do he’ll turn your life into a living hell. But he is bald, and bow-legged, but he is man to whom you can submit yourself, marry him because he will become handsome in your eyes in six months. Young men ask yourself the question. “ *Is she the*

*kind of girl that shows signs of being this kind of wife ?”*

If she doesn't run from her like the plague.

**3. Finally, do you see the desperate need of being “born of the Spirit,” and being “filled with the Spirit ?”**

You see, you'll only be able to live this type of life, if you are cleansed by the blood and controlled daily by the Spirit. As a wife are you continually filled with the Spirit ? If you are then one of the marks of that will be glad and willing submission to your own husband.