

The Gospel-shaped Marriage

1 Timothy 2:9-10

B.I: The same gospel that unites the church to Christ also creates harmony out of the diversity of men and women bound together in Christian marriage.

LTS: Psalm 115

Let's begin by turning to Genesis chapter 1.

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, and WOMEN have sought to be liberated from such oppression; hence, the "women's liberation" movement of past generations.

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), notice the three affirmations:

- "God created man in His own image, (*we came from God*)
- in the image of God He created him; (*we bear a resemblance to God*)
- male and female he created them (*we were made male and female* In other words, both man and woman 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. 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 with one another and God.

Last week we watched as the Apostle Paul took us back to Genesis to unpack some important details germane a woman's role in the church. What I do want to highlight now,

however, is the change that occurred between the man and woman when sin intruded into their relationship.

(Read Gen. 3:8-13)

After this, God curses the serpent (14-15) and then He talks to the woman about the consequences of her sin. He says (read 16).

Now what does He mean when He says, “*Your desire will be for your husband.*” Well, 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 (read 4:7).

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 her own way. 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!

Read Ephesians 5:22-33

Now it is NOT my purpose this morning to exegete this entire passage text. We have done that on a number of occasions in the past, and I would especially point you to our study of Ephesians where we spent three weeks walking through the passage phrase by phrase. This morning, however, I was to approach it with a broader brush and make some practical observations that I believe will help us better understand how men and women are to relate to one another in marriage.

There are three things I want to discuss from this text:

- I. The Purpose of Marriage
- II. The Husband’s Leadership
- III. The Wife’s Submission

I. The Purpose of 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 show the world what Christ's relationship with His church is like. 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 the union of Christ and His church after a pattern of human marriage – just the reverse! He created human marriage on the pattern of Christ's relation to the church.¹

3. You see, beloved, this is why there are established roles in marriage. As 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 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. 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 by the church.” This is how God's purpose in marriage is fulfilled.

5. So let's talk about our respective roles.

II. The Husband's Headship:

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

² Ibid.

1. In Eph. 5:23 Paul says “*the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church.*” Since the “head” is the ruling part of the body, Paul used it figuratively to describe authority. The Greek word *kephalē* is translated “head” both in 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23. Throughout history Christians have always understood the word to mean “authority over.”³ Just as Christ is the leader of His church so men are the leaders of their homes. Notice that Paul does NOT say the man *should be* the head but that “*he is the head...*” In other words, God has assigned him this role and will hold him accountable for it whether he accepts it or not.

2. But what does it mean for a man to be the leader in his marriage and home? Briefly stated, “In the home, biblical headship is the husband’s divine calling to take primary responsibility for Christ-like leadership, protection, and provision.”⁴ I think it will be helpful to talk about appropriate, practical expression of this leadership.

A. Headship is a Call to Sacrificial Love:

- Since the husband is to take his leadership cues from Christ we know that such leadership is a call to the ministry of loving service. Paul says (Eph. 5:25) “*Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her...*” The implication is that a husband leads proactively out of a kind of love that is willing to commit the greatest acts of self-denial for the one loved. Elsewhere Jesus said, “Let... the leader [become] as one who serves” (Luk. 22:27)
- Therefore, the husband who comes home after work , plops himself down in front of the TV and begins barking orders to is wife and children has abandoned the way of Christ. Leadership is personified in Jesus when he wrapped himself in a towel and washed his disciple’s feet. No one in that room questioned whether Jesus was the “head” of his disciples. So woe to the husband who thinks his maleness is a license for a domineering, demanding attitude toward his wife.

B. Headship is NOT controlling:

- Godly male leadership does not try to govern all the details of his wife’s life or require that she clear all her actions with him. Rather, he must lead in such a way that encourages his wife to depend on Christ and not himself.
- Even when acting as Christ, the husband must remember that Christ does not lead the church as His daughter, but as His wife. He is preparing her to be a “fellow-heir,” not a servant girl (Rom. 8:17). Any kind of leadership that, in the name of Christ-like headship, tends to foster in a wife personal immaturity or spiritual weakness or insecurity through excessive control, picky

³ MacArthur, J. (1996). *Different by design* (p. 33). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ John Piper and Wayne Grudem (editors), *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 1991), 66

supervision, or oppressive domination has missed the point of the analogy in Ephesians 5. Christ does not create that kind of wife.

C. Headship takes Initiative:

- Headship does mean that the husband has to initiate every action, but that he feels the responsibility to provide a general pattern of initiative. Certainly his wife will have the freedom to do all kinds of initiating and planning. But there is a general tone and pattern of initiative that should develop which is sustained by the husband.⁵
- John Piper argues that having a more gifted wife is no excuse for not leading. *“A wife will always be superior in some things and a husband in others. But it is a mistake to ignore that God-ordained pattern of husband leadership on the grounds that the woman is a more competent leader. Any man with zeal to obey the Word of God can be a leader, no matter how many superior competencies his wife has.”*

D. Headship Offers Spiritual Leadership:

- The husband should feel greater responsibility to take the lead in the things of the Spirit; you should lead your family in a life of prayer, in study of God’s word, and in worship. You should lead in giving the family a vision of its meaning and mission; you should take the lead in shaping the moral fabric of the home and in governing its happy peace.
- Again, Piper writes: “I have never met a woman who chafes under such Christ-like leadership. But I know too many wives who are unhappy because their husbands have abdicated their God-ordained leadership and have no moral vision, no spiritual conception of what a family is for, and therefore no desire to lead anyone anywhere.

E. Headship Involves Decision-making:

- A mature husband accepts the burden of the final say in disagreements between he and his wife, but does not presume to use it in every instance. Such a husband will seek out his wife’s wisdom and will appreciate it even when not sought. Often, he will gladly adopt her ideas. This is implied by the kind of Christ-like love that describes the relationship (Eph. 5:25), [and] in the equality of personhood implied in being created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), and in the status of being fellow-heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7). Unilateral decision-making is not usually a mark of good leadership. It usually comes from laziness, insecurity, or inconsiderate disregard.
- Nevertheless, both husband and wife should agree on the principle that the husband’s decision should hold sway if it does not involve biblically defined

⁵ Piper & Grudem, 39

sin.

F. Headship engages in Parenting:

- Godly leadership expresses itself by taking the initiative in disciplining the children when both parents are present and a sin has occurred or family standard has been broken.
- Proverbs makes it clear that both mother and father are to be obeyed (Eph. 6:1) and mothers are clearly seen as teachers of children in the home (Prov. 1:8, etc). Therefore, mothers have the authority, leadership, and responsibility to discipline their children. They do not need to wait until Dad gets home from work to spank a disobedient child. But children need to see the dynamic between mom and dad that says Dad takes charge to disciple when mom and dad are both present. No woman should have to take the initiative to set a disobedient child right while her husband sits idly by, as though nothing significant were at stake.⁶

G. Headship Models Humility:

- Godly leadership recognizes that the call to leadership is a call to repentance and humility, and risk-taking. Every husband has ample cause for contrition over our passivity or domination in the home. We must be willing to humble ourselves before God when we either shirk or overstep our responsibilities. The apostle John taught (1 Jn. 1:7) that *“If we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship with one another.”* This is a call to have an open and honest attitude about our own sin. (Model the gospel).
- Godly headship is a call to risk getting egg on our faces, to pray as never before, to be constantly in the word; to be more given to planning, more intentional, more thoughtful, less carried along by the mood of the moment; to be disciplined and ordered in our lives; to be tenderhearted and sensitive; to take the initiative to make sure there is a time and place to talk about what needs to be talked about; and to be ready to lay down our lives the way Christ did if necessary.⁷

III. The Wife’s Submission:

1. Paul says (Eph. 5:22), “Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. “Submission” refers to a wife’s divine calling to honor and affirm her husband’s

⁶ John Piper and Wayne Grudem (editors), *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 1991), 66

⁷ John Piper and Wayne Grudem (editors), *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 1991), 66

leadership and help him carry it through according to her gifts.⁸ 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. Wayne 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:⁹

- Jesus subject to his parents (Luke 2:51)
- Citizens subject to government (Romans 13:1)
- Demons subject to the disciples (Luke 10:17)
- 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. We have talked a lot in the last couple weeks about a wife’s role in the church. But what does a wife’s submission look like in the home?

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.¹⁰
- Remember, the wife’s loyalty is first of all to Christ not her husband.

⁸ Ibid, 61

⁹ Alexander Strauch, *Men and Women Equal yet Different*, (Littleton Colorado, Lewis and Roth, 1999), 44-45

¹⁰ Ibid, 47

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 in righteousness so that her disposition to honor him as head can again produce harmony.”¹¹

B. Submission communicates respectfully:

- When a woman addresses her husband personally and directly with an ere of superiority, it almost invariably 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.
- A beautiful example of this comes from the OT story of Abigail who talked David out of killing Nabal (1 Sam. 25:23-35). She exerted great influence over David and changed their 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.

¹¹ Ibid, 47

- Alexander Strauch explains that,

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”¹² 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. That’s because it harmonizes with the truth of God’s purpose in creation. And as Jesus taught us, its the truth that sets us free (Jn. 8:32).¹³

9. In the heart of a gospel-shaped wife there is a desire to submit to the Lord and to her husband as part of her submission to the Lord. Some forms of submission will come easily and naturally. Others you will need to grow into by prayer faith and practice and the help of your husband and other godly women.

10. In the heart of a gospel-shaped husband leadership is understood NOT as a license for domination or bossy passivity, but as a call to servant leadership that thinks in terms of responsibilities not rights. He sees them as wise and gracious prescriptions for how to discover the true freedom of God’s ideal.

Conclusion:

As godly men take up their role as Christ-like leaders and godly women take up their role as church-like helpers a beautiful and healing harmony begins to hold sway over a marriage. In this way the sinful and damaging effects of the fall begin to be reversed. The fall twisted man’s loving headship into hostile domination in some men and lazy indifference in others. The Fall twisted women’s intelligent submission into manipulation in some women and brazen insubordination in others. The gospel changes all of that.

¹² Alexander Strauch, *Men and Women Equal yet Different*, (Littleton Colorado, Lewis and Roth, 1999), 66

¹³ Ibid, 47

B.I: The same gospel that unites the church to Christ also creates harmony out of the diversity of men and women bound tog