

Indicatives & Imperatives in Marriage: The Wife, Part 2

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Over these past few weeks, we've been considering the divinely-ordered relationship of marriage which is the first divinely-ordered relationship in a string of them that we find here in chapter 5 of Ephesians. We've considered several important distinctions that are to help us think through and have really hooks to hang some of these thoughts on as we have seen them unfold here in Ephesians 5. First, we considered the distinction between the ontological and the economical, and then we moved forward into distinguishing between the indicative and the imperative. If you recall, an indicative statement is just a statement of fact, while an imperative statement is a statement of instruction of command, and we find that the Scripture speaks to both spouses in relation to their indicative and their imperatives within the marriage relationship. The indicatives do not address what one does in the relationship but rather what one is in the relationship. We've been using the word "role" to identify the indicatives in the marriage relationship; the husband and wife both have separate roles. One's role in the relationship, again, it's not what one strives to be but it actually is what one already is by the very nature of their being in this relationship. But the imperatives, on the other hand, we've been associating with the word "duties," the commands that are given to these particular individuals in these divinely-ordered relationships. Unlike roles which indicatives tell us what one is in the relationship, duties indicate the responsibilities of what one is to do in that relationship.

Paul begins by addressing the wife and last week we considered the indicatives in relation to the wife. We found that Paul spoke of the indicatives of the wife in both the negative and the positive. In verse 23, Paul says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands for the husband is head of the wife." So Paul's first and primary description of the wife's indicative or role is negatively articulated. The wife's role is foremost found in what she's not, she's not the head of the relationship. But positively Paul indicates, which took us back to the creation account to see what God identifies the wife to be in the marriage union from the very beginning of the institution, we found that she was created as helpmate to the husband. Additionally as Paul communicates in Ephesians 5, the wife also is church mirror. She always and inescapably mirrors the church in its relationship to Christ who is head of the church.

Well, tonight we're going to be moving from the indicatives that we considered last week into the imperatives or the duties associated with the wife in the marriage relationship. Of course, next week we move into the head of the relationship which will be addressing husbands which is the majority of the time that Paul spends in his address in Ephesians 5.

The imperatives that Paul clearly issues forth in our passage in relation to wives is twofold. First, she is called upon in her duties of submission; and then secondly, the duty to respect. In verse 22 he says clearly, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands," but if you'll notice in his summary verse which is the very last verse of this paragraph, verse 33, he ends off by saying, "let the wife see that she respects her husband." So let us consider them both: submit on the one hand, and respect on the other.

As we've noted before, the word "submission" itself originally literally means "to line up under," which when applied to human relationships, it is for one to line up under the authority of another party. As one who is not the head of the relationship, Paul speaks of the wife as one that is to be subject to the husband. Notice in verse 24, he writes here, "just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be subject to their own husbands." So this same word is even used when the disciples come in from ministering and come in from proclaiming the Gospel, they are healing and they are performing all types of miracles and they come back to Jesus and if you'll recall, the disciples return and say, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

So you see this carries with it a sense of willful obedience and subordination to the one who possesses a legitimate authority in this interchange or this relationship. You might say if someone who is a modern American were in the room tonight and was not convinced at all of the authority of God's word or the inspiration of God's word, he or she would probably protest more assuredly Paul's use of this language in this passage, but actually there are three challenges to wives that really militate against this biblical teaching of submission and I want us to consider each of these three challenges that a woman is inevitably going to face. The first is sociological, the second is theological, and the third is semantical.

First, the sociological. Our modern Western context is obviously militantly in some cases opposed to the idea of submission at all in marriage. As we've seen, the hyper-egalitarian spirit that we find especially in the Western world of our day, does not welcome this teaching of Scripture at all on this subject. In fact, you don't have to look far, do you, to find that our culture around us would be much opposed to this. It's claimed that surely Paul, unfortunate man, he was trapped in this socially constructed environment in some pre-modern era and that's why he's teaching this idea of submission. He's pre-modern. He really hasn't come to terms with the way we've developed over time to where we are now.

Well, in keeping with that very claim, one would have to also oppose Paul's teaching in the next passage we'll hit after the husband in reference to children obeying their parents which, indeed, many in our day are starting to actually oppose the idea of a child being required to obey its parent. It is an environment where you may often be labeled as a victim of chauvinism but as Christians, brothers and sisters, we're not promoting

chauvinism, we're actually promoting creationism. We desire to think God's thoughts after him and we listen to his revelation concerning how he has created and wired marriage for his own glory, and we're not taking the words from the latest cultural trend. But this present environment will prove to be a challenge to wives in our day.

The second is theological, this second challenge. If you recall back in Genesis 3 after the fall of man into sin, God comes into the garden and he issues a curse to all three of the parties that he finds there. He issues a curse to the serpent, to the wife, as well as to the husband and when these curses are pronounced, when he comes to the woman, he not only says unto her, which is the one that gets most of the attention, that she will experience pain in childbirth, that was one of the consequences of sin, but he also goes on to say, "Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you." This creation account in Genesis records that God had communicated to Adam that he was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that was not issued in the presence of both Adam and Eve alike. Thus Eve's rebellion in heeding the voice of the serpent was tantamount to her not heeding the voice of her husband, in effect, a lack of submission, not living in subjection to the word of her husband. So one of her curses is that she will continue to be challenged, if not plagued, with the desire to exercise authority over her husband.

So there is a very real theological challenge that wives face in this matter of submitting to her head, but here we should also note the kindness of God, and we're also going to note this when we get to the husband. It's interesting that God really has matched her chief duty to her husband to that which she has as her highest challenge. Her challenge is submitting to her husband and what is the one directive, the primary directive that Paul issues to the wife? To submit and we're going to find the same with the man, his greatest struggle is to love his wife and that is the very imperative that he's given. So there, in a sense, God is really, we should see the kindness of God in giving these directives and these instructions that we so desperately need that hits at the very heart of what is our great challenge. I would also argue that in so doing it also is the fulfillment of one of the man's greatest needs is to receive such submission.

We have this sociological challenge, we also have a theological challenge, but there also is a semantical challenge and I want us to take care as we walk through this. Notice the comprehensive scope that Paul gives us here in verse 24 in relation to submission. He says here, "Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands," and notice the last two words there, he says "in everything." Now this is important to note, yet it is difficult for our modern American minds to accept this, but this call for the wife to be subject to her husband is without reference to the quality of his headship. This means that she is called to submission not only when he is being a good head, but also when he's being a poor head. The submission is not called for when he proves himself to be worthy of such submission or has reached some level or quality of headship that earns him that submission, no, it is in everything, Paul says, for because he is the head just as the husband, as we will see, is to love his wife not just when she's lovely and not when she's proven herself worthy, the same as here in reference to submission.

This doesn't mean there's not going to be meaningful dialogue between husband and wife on matters pertaining to their marriage, and we'll certainly be dealing more with what that looks like for the husband as he loves his wife in those dialogues, but given the comprehensive scope of this call to submission in everything, there is going to be a challenge that I would like to call a semantic challenge. Submission in our day seems to desire to change the meaning of the word submission. The meaning of submission that often is employed in today's society and unfortunately in the church as well, has built within it the notion of condition. Submission is conditioned on the level of agreement between the parties. In other words, one might say, "I will submit to you so long as, or on the condition that I agree with you. So long as I'm okay with your assessment of things, I will gladly submit." But, you see, this is precisely when one's commitment to submission comes into play. Anyone can easily promise saying, "Oh yes, I will submit to you," when everybody is in agreement. "I'll submit to your authority but if I disagree with something, the deals are all off at that point." But, you see, this is to change the definition of submission because it is actually only when there is disagreement that arises, when there's not a seeing of eye-to-eye that submission even comes into play. When they're in agreement with one another and there is seeing eye-to-eye, there is not really an exercising of submission at all. Unfortunately, elders deal with this from time-to-time as shepherds. We'll call someone to repent of open sin and defiance against God and suddenly this one who has vowed himself or herself to submit to the governance of the church, suddenly says, "But I disagree with you," and then walks out the door.

You see, when everybody agrees, submission is not even a concept. Do you see it? Do you see that? It's only upon disagreement that submission actually becomes submission. So Paul, you see, knowing the human heart in divinely-ordered relationships, he makes it a point to say in this matter of submission, to submit to your husband in all things so there is no condition there that he builds into that definition.

One might say, "Well, okay, I'll go along with him and submit to my husband because I have to, but I'm going to make it very clear to him that I'm not happy about it, and I'm going to make sure that my attitude reflects that." Well, that leads us to the complementary imperative that Paul gives in verse 33 concerning respect. Let's consider that a moment in verse 33. He says, "let the wife see that she respects her husband." This respect is to maintain always an attitude and disposition of reverence for the husband. A disposition of reverence for him, to honor him in all things and to honor him in all ways.

You say, "Well, he's not somebody that always really wins my respect." But remember that Peter, if you recall when we were going through 1 Peter, Peter was writing to a woman who was married to an unbeliever and he writes to this woman, he uses her in this example when he addresses wives and she's married to a man that does not share her values, he does not share her convictions, he does not share her beliefs, and quite likely treats her like a jerk, and it's interesting that in that very context Peter does not say leave, which is what would be the advice that some might give today. He doesn't even say rebel, usurp his authority, exercise authority. No. In fact, it's just the opposite. In 1 Peter 3, he

says, "Submit yourself to your husband so that he may be won without a word by your conduct when he sees your respectful and pure conduct."

Wow. Respectful means looking for ways to honor him not only with one's actions but honoring him with your words, seeking to build him up and not to tear him down; seeking to be gentle and not harsh or nagging. Respectful means never speaking poorly of him, be that in his presence, or even worse yet or perhaps more importantly, never speaking ill of him or poorly of him behind his back in the presence of another. That's not honorable in any way whatsoever for a wife to speak negatively about her husband to others. Respectful means exercising submission without grumbling or with an attitude of disgust but rather it is to do so with a reverential spirit.

Submission and respect. Concluding here, she's not to exercise submission with grumbling or disgust but with a reverential spirit. What needs to be remembered is that after all, the motive to live with him in such submission and respect is actually not even found in him, and there's the key. Do you notice what Paul writes in verse 22? He says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." You see, herein lies the motivation that leads to godliness in this area of wives. Herein lies the way that the Gospel transforms this whole situation. This is, to use the modern lingo, this is a Gospel-centered way of dealing with the matter of submission.

You see, the wife lives with her husband in this way not because he's merited it in some way. Do you hear the Gospel in all that? Not because he's merited or because he's become worthy of it. No, she lives in contented submission in everything, respecting her husband in all things because it pleases her God. It pleases her Lord. Because of her love for Christ she knows that submitting to her husband in a godly way is ultimately properly submitting herself to her Lord. There it is. He is the one who owns her indicatives and he is the one that owns her imperatives and it is he, he that calls her as helpmate and has called her to submission and respect for her husband, the husband that he has given to me, you see. In so doing, who after all is she marrying so well? She is marrying the church. To use Peter's language, as she practices godly submission, he says she adorns herself. That's a great word. She adorns herself. He speaks of it in beauty. He says, "with an imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which in God's sight is very precious." You see, as she adorns herself with these qualities that God has called her to, she looks more and more like what God has called the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ to look like in relation to Christ.

So, wives, let me just speak directly and encouragingly to you. Be reminded again and again and again to exercise submission and respect as to the Lord. Let that be the backdrop of all of your thinking in this respect. You see, the Gospel cuts through the idea of worth, it cuts through the idea of merit. Submit and respect, dear sisters, because Jesus is worth it, you see. Jesus is worth it. It brings your Lord pleasure and what brings him the greatest pleasure is what brings you your greatest happiness in the end.

Church of the Lord Jesus, if indeed the marriage union is perhaps the closest way that we find in holy Scripture of God talking about the relationship of the church to Christ, let us

all be instructed tonight as the bride of Christ to see what our chief duty is in our relationship to Jesus. The chief duty in our relationship to our husband, the Lord Jesus, is respect and submission. The church is called to joyfully and willfully submit to the headship of Christ – watch it – yea, even when we do not agree with the providences that he has brought in our life. Even when our hearts are wishing to go astray, we need to be reminded that what he has deemed best for us is to submit ourselves to his word and his will even when it's most uncomfortable. That's his will for us, is to submit ourselves to his word in all things.

So tonight before he even moves on to the husband, he has taught really all of us a lesson, not just bringing a helpful lesson directed at the wife but also at the same time he's brought a very helpful instruction and lesson to each of us in our relationship to our husband, our Lord Jesus.

Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, such a delicate subject matter in our day where we find this whole subject matter to be one that is laughable in our environment and, Father, we receive it humbly and we receive it as your word and, Lord, we are mindful that what your will is that you communicate to us, is always in every circumstance what's best for us. So Lord, we thank you for communicating to us not just the roles as we've considered before, but the duties of a wife and her divinely-ordered relationship with her husband. Lord, I lift up to you now these wives at Westminster Church particularly and, Father, I would pray you would give them all of the grace and all of the equipping that they need to carry out faithfully these duties that you have called them to and, Father, I pray that you would grant them joy even in the exercising of these. Father, we love you and we thank you for the institution of marriage and all that it reflects in the church's relationship to Christ. We pray all these things in his...