

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

God's Pattern for Wives, Part 1

Scripture: Ephesians 5:22-24

Code: 1944

It's our privilege tonight to turn in the Word of God to a great portion of Scripture as a starting point for our message to you tonight of God's pattern for a wife. Ephesians chapter 5, verses 22-24, and there the Word of God says, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything."

God designed marriage to be the very best that life has to offer, the very best. In fact Peter rightly called it the grace of life. But since the fall of man it is anything but the best for most people. In fact for most marriage starts in a euphoria of emotion and love, bliss, and gradually descends at varying rates into war, characterized by bickering, bitterness, discontent, unforgiveness, separation and divorce. Punctuated all along by moments of truce. A losing struggle, and most today bail out. God's original design was very clear: one man, one woman, together for life.

The best, the very best. But since the Fall it has not been an easy road for marriage. We are reminded of Genesis 3:16 where God cursed man and woman for the sin that they committed, and sin caused the curse, and the curse hit marriage right at the heart. The woman as a result of the curse seeks to rule and not submit; she wants control; that is the fallen woman's tendency, and God commands again in the New Testament: "I permit not a woman to usurp authority over the man," 1 Timothy 2.

And the man also cursed is given to overpowering the woman, crushing her, subduing her. Thus the conflict and sin therefore left its mark, and part of that mark is marital conflict on the very inside of the marriage. You can add to that the terrible assault that Satan makes on the outside. We are reminded that before we ever get out of the book of Genesis marriage has been assaulted formidably from the outside. In chapter 4 of Genesis is polygamy, in chapter 9 pornography is born, in chapter 16 adultery, in chapter 19 homosexuality, in chapter 34 fornication and unequal marriages, in chapter 38 incest, in chapter 38 also the first prostitute is mentioned, and in chapter 39 the first specific case of seduction.

Conflict entered into the relationship between a man and a woman on the inside and on the outside. You can add to those things the fact that you have two sinners, two sinners in the flesh with strong desires for their own will and their own way, colliding. The only hope to reverse the inevitable disaster that accrues to this kind of relationship is to follow the pattern that God has revealed in Scripture. The

only hope for marriage is to be obedient to God's Word and to be empowered by God's Spirit.

Therefore, we can conclude that the hope of a good marriage, the hope of a great marriage, the hope of a blessed marriage, the hope of a happy and fulfilled marriage is salvation, which brings one into right relationship to God, which minimizes the curse, which implants the Holy Spirit and brings the believer under the authority and the willing obedience to Scripture, and then there is hope. In the passage that I just read to you there are several obvious points that are made here. But the overarching point is one about submission, and we draw that from verse 21 where the general responsibility of all believers to one another is to submit.

We submit mutually to each other, being more concerned about the other than we are ourselves, more concerned about the things of others than our own things. Looking not on the things which concern us, but the things which concern others - all of that we learned from the book of Philippians chapter 2. We are to approach all of our relationships with humility, with self-abnegation if you will, unselfishness, self-denial, and a desire to meet the need of the other person. So the general spirit of all relationships should be one of submission, and then in particular, "wives be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord."

You will notice that the word "be subject" or "submit" in some versions is in italics because it is not in the original; it's not in the original, it doesn't need to be there; he has just said "be subject to one another," and then he says "wives to your own husbands." Being subject is obviously implied. All of us submit at some point; wives submit to their husbands. She is to follow willingly, the leadership, the headship of her husband. This and this alone can minimize the curse, and reverse the conflict. We see then, first of all, the matter of submission there in verse 22.

The matter of submission clearly introduced, "be subject to your own husbands." Very specific, by the way. She is not available to all men. She is not told to be submissive to all men, only her own husband. The man she possesses, her own husband, the one that is hers, and there is in that very phrase a lovely sense of possession. He belongs to her, yet she submits to him, and there again is that magnificent mutuality. And in the parallel passage to the Ephesian passage, which is Colossians chapter 3; you can compare those two because they say the identical things. It says in Colossians 3:18, "wives be subject to your husbands," and there you do have the word "be subject," because it is not in the prior verse so it can't be implied.

"Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." This is fitting, this is appropriate, this is proper, this is right before the Lord. It is not a cultural preference; it is a spiritual command. "Fitting," by the way, is a word that has significance. For example, in the little letter to Philemon, in verse 8, it refers to something that is legally binding. Thus it is here indicative of a commandment from God. It is also used that way in the Old Testament Septuagint, or Greek version. There is a limit, by the way, to what is fitting in this role of submission. It does not mean that a woman submits to her own husband

in that which dishonors God.

You remember, don't you, in Acts how the apostles said when commanded not to preach we must obey God and not men. If that comes to that, you have to choose to obey God. I think of Vashti in the book of Esther, the first wife of the king. The king came to her and asked her to dance a lewd dance before a drunken crowd, and she refused, and rightly so, rightly so. But in the created order and in the proper design of God it is legally binding by the commandment of the Almighty Himself that a wife be in submission to her husband.

It is fitting, Paul says, before the Lord. His leadership is given by God and she is to recognize that, and in a humble spirit of loving submission come under that leadership. Again, I remind you that this should be easy to do; it should be very appropriate, well understood except for the curse, except for our sinfulness, and except for the onslaught that Satan has brought against marriage to confuse these issues. Now as we look at Ephesians chapter 5 and consider these instructions, "wives be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord," we find there are some supporting passages to these, and we want to look at them for a moment before we go on in the text.

Turn to 1 Peter chapter 3, 1 Peter chapter 3; they further open this truth to us and help us to understand it. 1 Peter chapter 3 says, "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands," and again you have the very same issue. What is quite interesting is that little phrase "in the same way." Go back to verse 13 (chapter 2), "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evil doers and the praise of those who do right."

In other words, all of us submit to the authority of government. Verse 18, "Servants, submit to your masters with all respect. Not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable." Now keep this in mind - we all submit to the government, to the king, the authorities, to the governors. Verse 15, "This is the will of God." "We are to fear God and honor the king," verse 17 says. It doesn't tell us what form of government, what kind of government, what the moral standards of that government happen to be; it says we are to submit.

Then in verse 18, the same kind of submission to your employer, whether he is good and gentle or absolutely unreasonable. This finds favor with God. "If for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly." One of the reasons I don't believe in a strike. No matter how difficult your employer might be, you bear up; that finds favor with God. When you suffer unjustly you are increasing your eternal reward. Then the most marvelous illustration of suffering unjustly, sometimes under the oppression of a government, sometimes under the oppression of an employer or a slave owner in ancient times.

But the greatest illustration is the Lord Jesus himself. Verse 21, "Christ also suffered for us leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." He shows us how to suffer unjustly; He shows us how to bear the burdening yoke of unfair leadership; He suffered, committed no sin. Verse 22, "Was no deceit found in His mouth. While being reviled, He didn't revile in return. While suffering, He uttered not threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." And in the process, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed."

In other words, Christ suffered undeserved punishment. He suffered it without retaliation, without reviling back; He uttered no threats. He just turned Himself over to God, took His suffering, and in the end it had a profoundly significant result. It redeemed souls out of the human race, and then you come to chapter 3, verse 1. Remember, there are no chapter breaks in the original text. "In the same way you wives." What do you mean "the same way?" As someone under the authority of government, as an employee under the authority of an employer.

Whether the government is good, bad or indifferent; whether the employer is good and gentle or abusive and unreasonable. In the same manner that Jesus suffered unjustly and did nothing but commit Himself to God for God to bring out of that unjust suffering a glorious end, "you wives be submissive to your own husbands." The implication here is that it really doesn't matter what kind of husband he is. You say, "I have a husband who's disobedient to the things of God, who's indifferent to Jesus Christ - who is not kind and loving - is not good and gentle." All the more reason, Peter says, "in the same way you wives be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives."

Line up under them. All the more reason if they are not saved, if they do not obey the Word of God. Some are unsaved - implied there - but it could also imply a person who had made a profession of faith in Christ and was not obedient to the Scripture. All the more reason to be submissive. And again I remind you "as is fitting," and fitting has its limits; you're not to be submissive if he commands you to do directly that which opposes the Word of God or commands you not to do that which the Word of God does command you to do. But apart from those things for which you are under the command of God, you must submit to your husband, *hupotass*, "line up under him."

The key in verses 2 and 3, "as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior"; that's what you want them to see. You want them to see your virtue, your purity. And then in verse 3, "And let not your adornment be merely external" - only external - "braiding the hair and wearing gold jewelry or putting on dresses, but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God." You have a husband who is a trial to you either because he's unsaved or he's a disobedient believer. He fails to fulfill all of your hopes and expectations for what you would want as a husband. He comes short of what you hope for and maybe what you thought he was, and you are gravely disappointed.

You chafe under his authoritarianism. He cares little for how you feel, it seems; all the more reason to be submissive; all the more reason to demonstrate to him a meekness, a purity, a respectful kind of behavior. All the more reason not only to adorn the outside. And please do that; we all appreciate it. But do more than that. More than putting on a pretty dress or wearing gold jewelry or doing your hair. Adorn your heart “with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.” And I might say every man’s dream.

It doesn’t mean you have to kill your personality. It doesn’t mean you have to become a robot. It doesn’t mean you have to become boring. It doesn’t mean you never give your opinion. But there needs to be deep down in your heart gentleness, quietness; that hidden part is precious in the sight of God. God prefers a woman like that. Like 1 Timothy 2 says, silent, learning in subjection. This is of great price. Verse 5, “For in this way in former times the holy women also who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.”

This has always been the standard, folks. This isn’t new. This isn’t some Pauline/Petrine bias or chauvinism. This isn’t something they just came up with. It’s always been this way. God has always desired that women have a meek and quiet spirit. God has always desired that they adorn the hidden person of the heart with those imperishable qualities. He has always desired that they are “submissive to their own husbands,” and again that same phrase “their own husbands.” Not to all men; women collectively are not under the control of all men. A wife is under the control of her husband.

And verse 6 gives us an illustration, “Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham.” May I suggest to you that the concept of submission comes eventually to the point of obeying. She called him lord; there’s a thought. “Yes, my Lord.” There’s something wrong with that. It just doesn’t sound modern, does it? She called him lord, she obeyed him, “and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.” That’s what comes up; when you do counseling, inevitably when you’re talking to a woman about how she should respond to the leadership of her husband, whatever kind of leadership it is. She says, “You don’t understand; it’s very difficult, and sometimes I’m afraid of where he’s going to lead me; I’m afraid of where he’s going to take me,” and that is precisely why this verse says just obey, call him lord, do what is right and don’t be frightened by any fear.

Because you have put yourself in the place of the blessing and protection of God. As Abraham was the father of the faithful, Sarah is the mother of the submissive; she’s the prototype. Abraham is the prototype of faith; she’s the prototype of submission. No terror, the word is literally “terror” at the end of verse 6. Great peace, great security. It’s a tremendous passage, tremendous passage, and it cannot be argued against. It is too clear and too direct. 1 Corinthians chapter 11 is another passage that demands our attention as we think about what it means to be submissive.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 3 and following, is a fascinating portion of Scripture dealing with the woman. Let's start with a brief reminder that in Corinth a woman's liberation movement had arrived, and perhaps there were certain Christian women who were enjoying their new liberty in Christ. Thinking they were now free in Christ, they thought they no longer perhaps had to be under the authority of their husbands, and since they were one in Christ with them their spiritual equality gave them complete freedom and complete equality on all fronts, and so they were overstepping their limits.

As a result they were bringing reproach on the church and reproach on Christ, and apparently in Corinthian society a veil was the symbol of submission, the symbol of modesty, the symbol of meekness. In the past I've done some reading in the history of that period of time, and I found out that there were basically two kinds of women who didn't wear a veil. Feminists, those protesting the role of women, and harlots, those prostituting the role of women. So protesters and prostitutes threw off their veils. That's the background.

Verse 3, "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." Paul is just saying this to show you that there is an authority and submission principle built in all the way from God on down. This isn't something cultural; it isn't something just recently invented. There has always been in God's plan and God's economy a place for submission and authority. And along that line, verse 4, "Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head; for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved."

Now we're getting a little more deeply into what was going on. The protestors in Paul's time were shaving their heads in protest against the feminine role. Verse 6, "If a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head." In other words, there's no happy medium. If you take the thing off, you might as well go the whole way and shave your head, because you have done as much as protest the purposes of God.

God accepts the fact that that culture had certain ways to identify women. They were covered and they had long hair. And that was the sign of their femininity; when they wanted to protest that they threw off the veil and shaved the head. He says if you're going to throw off your covering you might as well then go ahead and shave your head and join the prostitutes and the protestors. So he says to the Christian women, you can't do that. Your culture has an understanding of the distinction between men and women; that is a divine distinction.

Though the particular custom is not ordained by God, the distinction is - and in whatever way your society maintains that distinction, you be sure you hold it up lest they conclude that you are fighting against that. And if you take off your covering they will conclude that you might as well shave your head and join the march. Take off your shirt and like the bare-breasted pig stickers that we talked about last time, run through town stabbing pigs to prove your macho femininity. On the other hand, in verse 7, "A man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of man."

Man is not to wear anything that marks submission. He is not to wear that which identifies a woman. Back in Deuteronomy it says a woman is not to wear anything that appertains to a man or vice versa. Men were not to be covered. By the way, even the Jews who cover their heads - still do when they pray - do so from a misinterpretation of Exodus 33. You know why they do it? They say because Moses veiled his face. That is a completely different issue. He was veiling his face so that they wouldn't see the glory of God fading, as 2 Corinthians 3 tells us, but it had nothing to do with what God wanted for men to do in their times of prayer.

So men are to be uncovered. Since they are the image and glory of God, he says that this particular cultural thing in a sense does reflect something of God's created purpose - that man is the image and glory of God and the woman is the glory of man. She finds a reflected glory, it's as if he would say the man is the sun and the woman is the moon who shines because of the brightness of the sun shining on her. For man, created order supports this, verse 8 and 9, "That man does not originate from woman, but woman from man. For indeed man was not created for the woman's sake; but woman for the man's sake." So the order of creation has put man in the place of headship and leadership, and woman in the place of submission.

She is to sustain the mark of that submission, which in that culture was long hair and the veil. That makes sense, that suits the created order, and you Christians should not violate that. If you're going to violate that just because you think you're free in Christ, then go ahead and shave your head join the prostitutes and the protestors; you've done as much in discrediting the distinctions that God has made. Then in verse 10 he adds another thought, "Therefore, the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels." That's most interesting.

What it's saying is that the angels recognized the authority and submission principle. The angels no doubt have been told by God about how he has designed man and woman to live together. That would be a great curiosity to the angels since among the angels there is neither marrying or giving in marriage. And so it is outside their realm of experience and comprehension, and consequently they're extremely curious about the whole relationship. They understand authority and submission, they understand the authority of God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, and they understand that there are even ranks of angels, there are principalities and powers and rulers, there are cherubim and seraphim, and they would understand all of that.

But with regard to man and woman and how they relate, they are very concerned to see God's order manifest in the church. No doubt God has expressed to the angels that the curse and the Fall, which threw marriage into chaos, can be minimized through the power of the Holy Spirit, through salvation. And you can look at the church and see at least a glimpse of what my original intention for marriage was. And so for the angels, maintain the symbol of authority on your head, women. Maintain your femininity, whatever the symbols of your femininity are, maintain them.

In that society and in most societies, it's long hair and a covering. Even the angels recognized that principle, and the purpose would be of course so that the angels in seeing this wonderful work in which God has brought about the mitigation of the curse and brought a man and a woman together without the conflict and the war and the hostility in Christ, and by the Spirit this would cause the angels to give praise glory to God. So the glory of God among the angels is the issue.

Then in verses 11 and 12, "However, in the Lord" - just to make sure you don't misunderstand it - "neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God." In other words there is mutual dependence. The man leads the woman, but the woman gives birth to the man. Don't think that this means because there's authority and submission that there is inequality spiritually, that there is inequality humanly, that there is inequality personally; there is not, there is not.

A beautiful interdependence; what is distinct are the roles. Not the intelligence, not the spiritual capability, not the mental capability, not the social capability, not the wisdom, but the roles. So Christian women must not think that their equality in spiritual standing before God and their great freedom in Christ has obliterated God's created and sustained and spiritually beneficial design for them. Another passage that we must draw to your attention is in Titus chapter 2, and I'll only introduce it tonight, and then next we come back we'll look at it a little more closely.

But in Titus chapter 2 there is some instruction beginning in verse 3 and running down through verse 5 that supports this concept of submission, and listen very carefully to what I say now. It takes the concept of submission to your husband and extends it to the range of home duties. It starts to unfold the duties. "Older women," it says in verse 3, "are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, not enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good." And obviously they teach the young women, according to verse 4, "that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands" - that comes first.

Love not purely in an emotional sense as we talk about falling in love, the bells and whistles. But love in the sense of self-sacrificing devotion to the privileged duty to which you have been called under his leadership and protection to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers

at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands for a very important reason: that the Word of God may not be dishonored. Now in verses 3-5 you have a series of short commands, very brief, but with immense and far-reaching implications.

And what is at stake, what is at stake is the Word of God not being dishonored. Wherever you see this women's liberation movement assaulting the church, the first point of attack is the Word of God isn't it. They assault the Scripture, they twist all these scriptures, they shift them around, they re-interpret them, they've got all this revisionist interpretation. And it goes from there to worst where they even produce Bibles where the name of God is she or she/he - the politically correct Bible.

But always women in the framework of Christianity, who want to move out of their God-ordained role, must assault the Word of God. It's not just that direct attack, which is being referred to here, but an indirect one that comes by way of the fact that when women don't obey what the Word of God says then those people watching that and knowing that will conclude that we don't think the Bible is really that important. Right? So the Word of God is dishonored, the Word of God is diminished as to its importance. We don't want to do that.

Ladies, you want to follow these patterns for the sake of your own joy, for the sake of the blessing of God, for the sake of making marriage the grace of life that God intended it to be, and for the sake of showing the watching world that we obey the Word of God because we believe God has given it, it is binding and the source blessing. A lot is at stake when women want their independence; they wreck the marriage and they ruin their testimony; diminishing the Word of God, which Psalm 138:2 says God has exulted to His name.

Betty Friedan, way back in 1963, one of the early leaders of the feminist movement, wrote a book. She told women in this book "leave home and go to work"; and it was adamant, and it was really the bomb that popularized the feminist movement. Twenty years later no less than Betty Friedan wrote another book, this was called *The Second Stage*. In it she said this: "Feminine," she said, "Feminism has failed and I urge you working women to leave work and go home." A 20-year experiment failed, still failing miserably. She started something with so much feminine machismo in it; it's almost unstoppable.

The number one symbol of woman's rebellion against God's order is the independent working wife. Over 50 percent of all women are in the workforce; over 50 million working mothers, most of them with school-aged or younger children. In fact nearly half of the women with children under six work. Two out of three, because the younger women lead the parade in these working trends, two out of three children, three to five years old, spend part of their day in facilities outside their home, two out of three.

Women have abandoned the home; they're fighting for their independence, and the society has come behind them with tremendous, tremendous support. I think just, it just came into my mind, of Hannah. It says in 1 Samuel 1:21 her husband Elkanah went up with all his household to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow. He was just going to the temple to carry out his annual religious observance, and he asked Hannah to go. Hannah didn't go. It was just a trip up and back. She said to her husband, "I will not go up until the child is weaned."

Literally in the Hebrew "until the child is fully dealt with." She wouldn't even go on a trip if it would in any way hamper the attention she needed to give to that child. The abandonment of the home, the abandonment of the children, the isolation of the woman as the independent working woman of course escalates the already cursed and hammered union we know as marriage. Felice Swartz, in *Working Woman Magazine*, writes, "By the year 2000 when the children of today's current generation of career women are themselves emerging from their teens, the polarization of sexes that put women in the house at the nurturing end of the spectrum, and men in the office at the work end of the spectrum will have disappeared and with it all the stereotypes."

Of course we know that the U.S. government offers tax credits for those who hire babysitters so they can go to work. Marriages are being abandoned, families are being abandoned, the results are absolutely devastating. These people who advocate the working, independent, non-submissive wife call on her pride; they appeal to her self-esteem, her pride. They appeal if you will to her sin, telling her to leave her slave role and gain some dignity as a real person. They appeal to her lust for material things, they appeal to her already strong desire to dominate. And sadly, sadly, sadly, working, non-submissive wives and mothers contribute to lost children, delinquency, lack of understanding of God-ordained roles, rebellion, loneliness, adultery, divorce - you name it.

They are not under submission to their own husbands, they are not in the home, and the results are disastrous. When you foul up God's order, everything gets messed up, everything. The real calling of woman is to be in the home, to be submissive to her husband, to be following his lead, caring for her children, caring for her home. In 1 Corinthians chapter 7, I'll show you just a couple of other passages, and then I want to give you some interesting illustrations. 1 Corinthians chapter 7, verse 34. This is sort of an offhanded comment here, but it's just powerful, absolutely powerful.

In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul talks about a lot of things with regard to marriage and divorced people and virgins who never married. But down toward the latter part of the chapter he is giving some advantages to being single, some advantages to being single and listen folks, being single can be a tremendous blessing as I've told many young couples. The only thing worse than wishing you were married is wishing you weren't. So you want to be sure before you do that, that really is God's purpose for you. If you can stay single, life is simpler. Verse 34, "The woman who is unmarried" - that would be a divorced person in the context here - "and the virgin" - that would be the person that had never married - "both of them are concerned about the things of the Lord: that she may be holy both

in body and spirit.”

In other words now that the divorced woman is single and the virgin's never married, the only thing they really have to concentrate on is that which is about the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But look at the end of the verse, “But one who is married is concerned about the things of the world” - What things, particularly? - “how she may please her husband” - that's what she lives for. It's not supposed to be a place of conflict; it's supposed to be a place where the woman willingly falls submissively under the leadership of her husband and seeks how she can please him.

Now some of you women are just taking all this in and saying, “What about equal time?” That will come; that'll come; you just keep coming on Sunday night; wait until we get to those guys. You think you're squirming, you haven't seen anything yet. 1 Timothy 2:15, 1 Timothy 2:15, “Women shall be preserved” - saved, delivered, any of those - “through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.” Incredible verse. Earlier in this passage, verse 9, “Women are to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not winding all their gold and pearls through their hair to show off their wealth, and wearing costly garments.”

He's talking here, by the way, about worship, chapter 3, verse 15, how they conduct themselves in the church. So he's saying, “When you come to worship you don't get yourself all dolled up like you were going to a wedding or something. But you're going to adorn yourself when you come to worship. You do so by means of good works, as is fitting to women making a claim to godliness.” Then it says, “Let a woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.” There it is again, the whole idea of the submissiveness of a woman.

She comes, she hears the instruction with entire submissiveness. Verse 12, “I don't allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” In the order of the church, women don't teach, women don't preach; they sit and listen and learn. That's not something new; that's because “Adam was first created, then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression.” Both because of, are you ready for this, created order and because of vulnerability. A woman is not in the place of authority. She needs to be under the protection of her husband lest she be deceived, and that is God's design originally in creating Adam first and Eve to be his helper.

You say then woman is a second-class citizen; no. Verse 15, a woman “shall be preserved from” what? From some kind of stigma that she bears because she was deceived, she led the whole race into sin, the conclusion is she is, as Peter says, the weaker vessel; she needs covering and protection. She led the race into sin when she abandoned that covering and protection, stepped out from under husband's authority, acted independent, led the whole race into sin. When she did that she put a stigma upon womankind. How can that stigma be removed? Here it is, verse 15.

She is preserved from that stigma “through the bearing of children.” If those children continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint. Once a woman led the race into sin. The stigma that woman bears can be reversed when a woman raises a godly generation of children; that’s what he said. That’s the marvelous balance; we’re the – the men are the ones giving the orders, but the women are the ones with all the influence. They’re the ones who press those little lives to their own heart and nurse them in those early years. They’re the ones that are there all the time binding up their little wounds and taking them through the issues of life day in and day out.

We show up after work to pontificate around the place. We develop the theology, but they have them in their hearts. I always laugh when I see these great athletes, and I’ve never seen one say, “Hi Dad.” All they ever do is say, “Hi Mom.” Great big huge monstrosities out there beheading each other – “Hi Mom.” In fact we always hear this. We talk to coaches and they tell us you don’t recruit athletes, you recruit their mothers. If their mother likes you, you’re in. The woman reverses the stigma of having led the race into sin when she raises godly children.

That is the marvelous, marvelous calling of a woman. The domain of her home, she’s a keeper at home, a worker at home, a lover of children, a lover of husband, submissive. I can’t resist further defining the magnificence of this role in Proverbs 31. Turn back to Proverbs 31; I’m just going to refer to it briefly, and then close with a couple of illustrations that are pretty powerful. But chapter 31 talks about an excellent wife and this is a great, great description of an excellent wife, starting in verse 10 of Proverbs 31. Guys, this is the kind of woman you dream about; this is what every woman should desire to be.

“An excellent wife, who can find?”, verse 10. They’re hard to find one. “For her worth is far above jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her.” Find a woman first of all that you can trust; trust her with everything. Trust her with relationships, trust her with your children, trust her with your money, trust her with your possessions, trust her with your relationships. She won’t go around undermining those. “He’ll have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.” This is an amazing woman. “She looks for wool and flax and works with her hands in delight. She is like merchant ships; she brings her food from afar.” She’ll go anywhere for a bargain.

Amazing woman; works with her hands, goes everywhere with her little coupon book. Verse 15, “She rises also while it is still night and gives food to her household.” I have so many memories of that as a kid, I have so many memories of the mornings of my life and awaking not by an alarm, but by what was coming out of the kitchen. “She gives food to her household and portions to her maidens.” This is a very enterprising woman. She finds a field that’s for sale and she buys it. She’s got earnings and she plants a vineyard. Somehow she’s got a cottage deal going inside the home; she’s been able to earn some money to help.

“She girds herself with strength, makes her arms strong.” Probably not because she went to the gym, but because she worked. “She senses that her gain is good; her lamp doesn’t go out at night” - stays up late, gets up early. Life was tough in those days. If you wanted clothes, you did what? - you made them; if you wanted food, you made it; if you wanted some food to eat, you grew it. If you wanted to grow it, you had to have a field. So when you married a woman to provide meals, that meant she had to buy a field, plow a field, plant a field, harvest a field, make the food while you were off doing whatever, doing business in the city.

“She stretches out her hand to the distaff; her hands grasp the spindle.” She’s weaving, weaving coats. It can get cold in that part of the world in the winter.

“She extends her hand to the poor; she stretches out her hands to the needy; she’s not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet.” Not only do they have warm garments, but they’re beautiful. “She makes coverings for herself, her clothing is fine linen and purple.” And you know what, “her husband is known in the gates.” They know him as, “that’s so and so’s husband. Oh yeah, I know that guy, that’s so and so’s husband.” He’s known in the gates “when he sits among the elders in the land.” They’re all a little jealous.

“She makes linen garments and sells them.” There’s how she makes a little money to buy that field. “Supplies belts to the tradesmen. Strength and dignity are her clothing, she smiles at the future.” Why? She plans ahead. “She opens her mouth in wisdom and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.” Boy, what kind of model is she for her children? “She looks well to the ways of her household, doesn’t eat the bread of idleness and her children rise up and bless her. Her husband also, and he praises her saying: ‘Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all’” - you’re the best.

“Charm, it’s deceitful; beauty it’s vain” - doesn’t last – “but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her the product of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.” It all works around the home, doesn’t it, and the husband, and the children, and the needy. That’s where a woman needs to give her life. Some women are – now they’ve been sold this whole feminist deal; they grab their briefcase, put on their suit and went to the office and have done their thing. Now all of a sudden, 10 or 15 years later, there’s a terrible hollowness in their hearts.

Many of the same women who in their 20s pursued career, didn’t want children intruding in their life, now find themselves in their 30s and 40s with an emptiness, and a terrible dissatisfaction, a hollowness, a sense of unfulfillment, and the reality that they missed the whole purpose of life and they can’t ever get it back. Despite their worldly successes, an indefinable longing sets in and some of them begin to see motherhood as the experience they want. They want to have a baby; you hear them say that all the time.

This attitude perceives motherhood as some kind of feminine achievement. I've had my career, I've made my money, and now I want to make my baby. I want to show the world that I can do that, that's my next achievement, my next personal accomplishment. I've been a successful lawyer and now I'm going to show you I can be a successful mother. Children, however, are not a prize to win, they are not a goal to achieve, they are not a way to proclaim someone's femininity, they are not a little doll to dress at the gymboree better than everybody else's kids are dressed.

They're not somebody to fill out your wounded ego and unfulfilled life. One lady said, "I've got the house, I've got the cars, we have the vacation home, I've had the career, now all I need is a couple of kids." I guess she thought that way she could go down as a monument to femininity. Women who look at having children as a means of personal fulfillment are really mistaking the issue. First, because if all they want is an experience, an experience is very temporary, but that kid is going to be around for a long time, making a lot of demands that have very little to do with one's personal fulfillment. Have you noticed?

Secondly, this manifestation of self-centeredness undervalues the purpose and the significance of motherhood as God designs it, and usually sentences that little kid to a tragic life. This is the sentimental, romantic view of motherhood. And this sentimentalism is dangerous, because any time our emotions are driving the car, we will end up in a ditch. Babies wake up in the night, babies get sick, and they make a mess, and sometimes babies die. I admit that the tender, sweet and emotional side of motherhood is precious, but only because hard-headed reason and biblical discipline with lots and lots of hard work is steering the process.

Christian women need to have their approach to mothering anchored in the scriptures, not in their emotion. You're not going to learn mothering anywhere but in the Bible. You're not going to learn it from a talk-show host. You're not going to learn it from a magazine article at the check stand, in the market. You're not going to learn motherhood from classes on self-esteem. A healthy, godly view of mothering comes out of the Word of God, and it has to be learned there. We're going to look at that in days to come. Motherhood is not a romanticized ideal; it is a God-given task suited to a woman's frame, and accomplished joyfully by hard work through His grace and provision.

Godly motherhood does not focus on the pretty little child. It doesn't focus on infancy and childhood. Let me tell you, godly mothering focuses on adulthood from the start. It focuses on the long-term objective, which is mature, godly sons and daughters who will live to bring honor and glory to God. That is the calling of scriptural, spiritual motherhood. That's what God wants. Those who don't know Christ, they can't even approach it right; those who do must. Two weeks ago I received this letter, really a heartbreaking letter. Listen to what it says.

"I received your tape series on the family from my mother-in-law for Christmas. You were right, when you started the tape on the duty and priorities of the wife, you were right that it would upset a lot of people. I cried many tears listening to you. You hit the nail on the head regarding the moral decay of families and children, working mothers. The reason for the tears, I am a working mother. I have four children ages 11, 10, 3 and 1½. I've worked all of their lives.

I feel that I have lost the connection with my 11-year-old daughter, and that worries me as she approaches adolescence. My babies go through tremendous mommy deprivation daily, my 10-year-old acts out his frustration on everyone. My oldest children go to a private Christian school and that requires a lot of time in the evenings with homework. I get home after being gone nine to ten hours; I have to cook dinner, deal with the crying, mischievous babies, and try not to let the older ones feel left out because I'm too tired or there's no time left in the evening to work on their needs.

I would love to stay home and be a keeper of my house, but I have no alternative. My husband has chosen to ruin his career and our lives by selfishly indulging in drugs and alcohol. After a four-year roller coaster ride we separated when I found out that he was taking the babies to the park and drinking. I fear that he may get in to an accident with them or forget he has them with him. I have been put into the position of bread winner of this family and I deeply resent it. It is destroying my family; I am losing out on the most important part of my life, raising my children.

The part of me that is raising them is not the part of me that I like. I am tired, angry and frustrated all of the time; what a wonderful role model. Mom the hag. When we separated, I told my boss...separated from her husband...and he told me to call my pastor right away. Being somewhat new to a church body I couldn't figure out what my pastor could do. I told my pastor a few days later, he said he was sorry and that he would pray for me. During the initial separation I didn't attend church for a month. I continued to read my Bible daily and listen to tapes and radio ministry programs.

During that month I didn't receive a single call from the church or my pastor. Incidentally, we fill out weekly attendance cards and several friends are in ministry positions who know of our situation. When I did go back to church no one asked how things were, it was also at this time I asked my employer if I could work at home to save day care cost. He's a Christian and these costs were sending me financially over the edge; the answer was no. I thought I was naïve thinking that my church or my Christian employer should or could help in some way.

When I listen to you and your thoughts on the church's obligation to women with children I couldn't stop crying, I felt so let down by my pastor and church as well as my Christian employer. Well, I didn't write this to complain, I just wanted you to know how much I appreciate your messages and how you really have touched me. You've given me incentive to pray more fervently for God to change my situation so that I can do what I'm supposed to do. Be a keeper of my house and children.

I also pray for my husband. Keep on teaching the Word of God, it doesn't matter if noses get bent out of shape. It just makes us open our eyes and re-examine how we live our lives. Sad isn't it, in some ways it's all over and there's no going back."

The matter of submission is so clear in Scripture. To the husband, to the task of the home, that's God's call to women. Well, that's one verse, verse 22, and that's not even all that verse. We talked about the matter of submission; next time we're going to talk about the manner of submission, the motive for submission, the model of submission, and the magnitude of it.

Father, thank You for Your Word, which is so clear. Lord, You have given us a plan and if we follow it we're blessed. I pray for this dear lady, I pray for her, O God, that You might somehow get her in a position where she can be with her family. Her husband, who claims to be a Christian, Lord work in his life, bring him to commitment, bring them back together, may he become the supply and the support and the leadership and the strength, and the joy of her heart. Lord, we know that must be the prayer of many, many women.

We thank You for this church which is so eager to help those women who've lost their husbands, and to underwrite and support them so they can stay at home and care for their children. Lord, the ideal has been so devastated; raise up a generation of young people, Lord. Those who are now contemplating marriage, getting married or just recently married, Lord may they make the right choices. May there be correction where correction can be made, forgiveness for those who have failed this pattern, restoration, renewal, and Lord may there be a new beginning.

And for those, as we said, who are young and just starting Lord, may they walk in the path of obedience to Your Word. That there might be joy in the home, that You might be honored, Your Word not dishonored, and a generation of children raised to love you. Continue to lead us as we consider these great things in Christ name, amen.

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