

Reclaiming the Shape of Marriage: A Wife's Role

"An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels."

Proverbs 31:10

Introduction: *Hurt and confusion.* These words may well summarize how people view the role of a woman in today's culture and marriages. Story after story have been told of women in abusive relationships, or having to raise children by themselves, or simply unhappy situations where communication has broken down, sex is absent, and frustration is the norm. Trying to find solutions or seeing none has led to a mass amount of confusion about the design of marriage and roles in general, even questioning if they are possible or are merely some creation of men to keep women under their thumb. Combined, *hurt and confusion* has led to a turning away from God's plan to another made in our images, with *mantras* like:

- **Did God really say?**
- **You will NOT rule over me!**
- **My body, my choice**
- **Smash the patriarchy!**
- **What is a woman?**

A movement of thought has crept steadily into the minds and hearts of women over the last generation, promoting *sexual freedom, eliminating gender stratification, expanding human choice, and fighting for an equality that sees NO differences between a man and woman.*

While this is sad, concerning, and produced more discontent, misery, and anger than anything else, this should NOT surprise us. A quick review of Genesis 2-3 reminds us of **what happened to marriage and the hearts of women as a result of the Fall:**

- **Adam & Eve created as image bearers to fill the earth with God's glory, imaging forth His likeness and multiplying other image bearers**
- **Adam was created first, given the role of providing, protecting, and leading,** but he could not fulfill his purpose alone
- **Eve was created to help Adam fulfill his mission,** since she was the perfect fit for him, corresponding to him. She was created in the same image of God as Adam, possessing the same value and dignity, but with different functional roles.
- **When Adam and Eve both sinned,** Adam was held RESPONSIBLE, though Eve sinned first, since Adam failed in leading and protecting. This sin sent marriage relationships *spiraling*, and today we feel the effects.
- **Eve** was a blame-shifter, just like Adam, and faced the same shame and fear as Adam. But there were two distinctive, long term realities of Eve's sin: **1)** child-bearing will be a primary way of fulfilling her mission, would be HER seed that would crush the serpent, and would bring **pain** into her life; **2)** Her desire would be set against her husband, being by nature *contrary to his leadership*, and he would not know how to lead well, either abdicating or ruling.

Roles got flipped in the Fall. Men will tend to *abdicate leadership or use force to gain it*, and in the absence of leadership, woman will take the lead, which will cause frustration and anger, which would deepen the wounds of wives, causing them to be contrary to their husbands, and so on and so forth.

This morning we will address wives, and next week the husbands, simply because Genesis and Ephesians start with wives and then move to husbands. A few principles to keep in mind as we begin:

- 1) What the Bible presents is extremely **counter-cultural**, since the effects of sin have misshapen minds, hearts, and roles in marriage. Some of what is said this morning is going to clash with what has become normative in a culture that has distrusted and moved away from God's design
- 2) We understand some have never had experience with godly examples of loving leadership or humble following of leadership. We want to both teach this but also model it, so finding someone you trust to learn from is imperative.
- 3) Being a godly wife is NOT DEPENDANT on having a godly husband (and vice versa). It is more difficult, but the Bible does not give caveats for women to act a certain way *if her husband does not live up to his end of the bargain*. For those ladies who are NOT married, make sure you marry a godly man of character. Once you are married, your options are much more limited, and there are worse things than being single, and that would be being married to an ungodly man
- 4) Playing out godly roles is the **best way forward** to glorify God, which means it is also the path to true joy, contentment, and worship.
- 5) The ONLY way forward for women being a godly wife is to acknowledge their vast need for a Savior – since that is the only way to reverse the curse and get back into a Genesis 2 reality.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GODLY WIFE:

A godly wife willingly, volitionally, and joyfully follows her husband's leadership:

Let's start off with one of the hardest ones, or controversial, or misunderstood. This is the concept of **submission in marriage**. Let's first look at some texts, and then draw some observations:

Colossians 3:18 "*Wives, **submit** to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord*"

Ephesians 5:22-24 "*Wives, **submit** to your **own** husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the **head** of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church **submits** to Christ, so also wives should **submit in everything** to their husbands.*"

1 Peter 3:1 "*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*"

We have enough context of what happened in the Fall in Genesis 3 to understand *why* this is such a hard concept. We will focus in on the Ephesians passage, which means we need to understand what came before to understand this particular command:

- **Ephesians 1-3** – Gives our *positional righteousness in the gospel*, that we WERE dead in our trespasses and sins, but have been made alive through Christ because of the eternal love of God, the lavished grace of Christ and the security of the Holy Spirit

- **Eph. 4:20-24** – As believers, we are able to *put off sin, are renewed in our minds, and PUT ON the new self, created* (or re-created) **after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness**
- **Eph. 4:31-32** – In the gospel, we are able to *repent and forgive*, not allowing bitterness to rule
- **Eph. 5:1-2** – We walk in LOVE JUST AS we have been loved by Christ, in a sacrificial way
- **Eph. 5:8** – We walk in LIGHT, exposing the darkness
- **Eph. 5:15** – We walk in WISDOM, knowing the days are evil
- **Eph. 5:18** – We are filled with the Spirit, which means we daily, moment by moment, yield ourselves to Him, which allows us to have perspective, thankfulness, and humility

Why is this so imperative to review? Because submission is NOT NATURAL nor the shape of our hearts before the gospel transforms it. Without regeneration and continual walking in Christ, submission is impossible.

What is submission? A willingness to joyfully and volitionally place yourself under the authority of another. This definition has nothing to do with strength, value, or ability. In fact, everyone is under authority at some level. Marriage simply offers one area where God designed a specific opportunity.

Key Components of the Text:

1. **Wives submit to the OWN husbands, not every husband** – This is the voluntary choice a wife has in entering the covenant of marriage: that she willingly places herself under the authority and responsibility of a flawed, imperfect man
2. **A husband is the HEAD of the wife** – What does a head mean? The same thing that Christ being the head of the church means! It has to do with leadership, service, sacrifice, authority, and responsibility.
3. **A wife must first and foremost submit to Christ** – This is the most important piece of the puzzle. A wife who unwilling to submit to her husband is truly a woman unwilling to submit to the Lord, which is both the problem and offers the solution. A repentant, humble, and yielded woman to the Lord will have the motivation, ability, and strength to submit herself to her own husband, regardless of his contribution.
4. **Submission is all inclusive** – Notice the text offers no caveat, but expects submission in ALL things, in every area, with nothing off limits.
5. **A husband's inability to lovingly lead is not an out clause (1 Peter 3:1)** – Notice that Peter says that *even if some do not obey the Word*, it does not absolve a wife from respectful and pure conduct.

Key implications:

1. Submission signals that marriages are NOT 50/50 splits, but there is one God ordained leader and one God ordained helper and follower of that leadership, and each requires a 100% commitment to the role to be successful
2. Submission requires a wife to give up control, to leave room for her husband to lead, and to be a **responder** to the initiative of her husband, even if that means things will not get done the way one hopes or wishes.
3. Submission means that in a marriage **power struggle**, a wife is willing to yield, trusting the Lord and her husband, knowing that he ultimately holds the responsibility for outcomes.

4. Submission requires intelligent, willing, and wise support. It takes strength to lead. It takes another kind of strength to let another lead. It takes a Spirit filled amount of strength to let another lead when you think you can do it better, and yet are unwilling to take control or manipulate to get your way.
5. Submission only ends when the leadership is into a sinful act or pattern, not when something is against your preferences or wants. A loving husband will always consider these, but in the end, he must decide the best course of action, even if it may be against what a wife may want.

A godly wife glories in building up the home

Can a wife have a career? Is she supposed to be a house wife only? The Bible is clear that the primary place of ministry, life, and work for a wife will be in her home, though that does not mean it is exclusive.

Proverbs 14:1 *“The wisest of women **builds her house**, but folly with her own hands tears it down.”*

Titus 2:4-5 *“and so train the young women to **love their husbands and children**, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, **working at home**, kind, and **submissive to their own husbands**, that the word of God may not be reviled”*

1 Timothy 5:14 *“So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, **manage their households**, and give the adversary no occasion for slander”*

Implications:

1. **God’s design is for a wife to manage the home** – The idea is to direct and manage under the leadership of a husband. This will take time and primary focus, since it also has the rearing of children in the formative years in view. This is how a wife can show love to her husband, to be the primary director of the home without taking away leadership from him. *Does this man he does not do anything around the house?* By no means. A wife will direct the home in a way that honors the Lord and considers the best way to serve her husband. This means a husband **MUST** be involved in the overall direction of parenting, finances, involvement in spiritual disciplines, and activities. A wife will strive **NOT** to operate independently in any of these categories, and husband must initiate in each of these.
2. **A wife working outside of the home must be wisely weighed out** – There is precedent for wives thriving in work outside of the home. The wife in **Proverbs 31** engaged in commerce and made money for her family (31:16, 18), but not at the cost of raising her kids (31:28), or disrespecting her husband. In fact, he was able to lead and was known as a wise elder (31:23). But this meant she rose early before light came up (31:15), was not idle (31:27), and was dressed with strength (31:17). In other words, she was not a “career over family” woman, but worked outside of the home as was needed. That is the principle. Managing a home, especially when kids are young, is one of the greatest responsibilities and callings a person can have. The impact a wife has on kids is immeasurable, and simply working for some sort of fulfillment or extra money is not a wise exchange. Obviously, each family has to make their own decisions, and every situation is unique, but a wife who is freed up to provide, care, love, and manage her home is truly blessed.

A godly wife revels in building up her husband

From what we gleaned in Genesis 3, we know that men are called to have responsibility over their home, but they must do so knowing that the world around them, tainted by sin, is **set against them**.

They also know that their wives, by nature, **are set against them**. This pressure leads men to be *insecure in leadership and often unsure how to do it and even if they are doing a good job or not*. A wife provides a built in friend who can motivate, encourage, and build up a husband, and all that is required is for them to use something they all possess: *their words!* But a wife's words to her husband can either be a **bullet or shot of adrenaline**, something that tears him down or motivates him, one that reinforces his insecurity or helps him rise above. I've said that Erin can make me feel like I can run through a wall if I know I have her support, or feel like I have nothing to offer, all with a word.

Does this hold up Biblically? Five times in the book of **Proverbs** it addresses living with a **quarrelsome wife**, meaning one that is given to *scolding, contentious, bringing strife over trivial matters, and who is quick to find fault*. Here is the description that Proverbs gives of a quarrelsome wife:

- Like the dripping of rain (19:13)
- Better to live in the corner of the housetop (21:9)
- Like a desert land (21:19)
- Better to live on corner of a housetop (25:24)
- Like the continual dripping of a rainy day (or faucet) (27:15-16)

These are vivid illustrations. It means that being quarrelsome is not just a one time, knock-down, drag out conversation, but a continual, saturating, and eroding way of using words. *What does this look like in a marriage?*

- *Challenging a husband's authority by questioning his decisions – even the little ones*
- Grumbles or makes passive aggressive comments
- Reminds him of past failures – “You always _____”, “You never _____”.
- Degrades him verbally – and worse, publically
- Uses words and body language to communicate a lack of respect or agreement
- Excessively corrects him
- Dictates “how” he is doing something, or how he should lead, even when he actually IS leading
- Offers opinions when he has not asked for input.

Slowly but surely, a wife can saturate a husband's heart and mind, leaving him with anger, regret, disappointment and feeling disrespected, alone, emasculated, and unmotivated. One word at a time until he erupts, shuts down, or leaves.

What is the solution? I am amazed at how simple this one is but so neglected by our wives. In Ephesians 4:29, the answer to corrupting talk is to speak words that **build up, as fit the occasion, that gives grace to those who hear**. This means that we seek to use our words to encourage and build up, even if that person does not deserve it. Not everything in your minds has to come out of your mouth, but only that which is gracious and HELPFUL.

Wives, when was the last time you took time to tell your husband that you are proud of him, thankful for him, and grateful that he is your husband? If you were to spend most of your time building him up verbally and back it up with allowing him to initiate by giving him some space, you would see a newly motivated man. But even if it doesn't 'work', your call as a wife is to move away from being quarrelsome. The husband of **Proverbs 31** could trust his wife that she did him good and not harm all the days of her life.

A godly wife exemplifies true beauty

Proverbs 31:30 “*Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who **fears the LORD is to be praised***”

1 Peter 3:3-4 “*Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— 4 but let your adorning be the **hidden person of the heart** with the imperishable beauty of a **gentle and quiet spirit**, which in God’s sight is very precious”*

1 Timothy 2:9-10 “*likewise also that women should adorn themselves in **respectable apparel**, with **modesty and self-control**, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, 10 but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with **good works**.*”

Any wife should be the standard of beauty for her husband, and her godly character should be the greatest factor in that standard. Physical attraction is important but cannot be primary. A wife’s true beauty comes from the **hidden person of her heart**, the part of her that cannot be taken away or diminish but only grow. The list here and in the verses we’ve already looked at paints a beautiful picture:

- She fears the Lord rather than living for the praise of people or the values of culture
- She values modesty – she does not seek to be noticed by men other than her husband
- She possesses a **gentle and quiet spirit** – meaning she does not need to be the center of attention
- She practices self-control – Instead of trying to control others, or situations, she walks by the Spirit to trust the Lord with all things
- She is active and known for good works – these are prepared by God for every believer
- She knows holiness is the pathway to happiness
- She is a faithful in prayer for her husband and kids
- She is kind and respectful

None of this can be an act, but must come out of a maturing, submitted, joyful, restful relationship with Christ. Putting these qualities together, this seems like an overwhelming task. But if this is how God designed it, we know it is ultimately for our greatest joy, best, and thriving. Is it hard? Absolutely. Is it possible? Most assuredly. The role of a wife and mother is one of the most valuable in God’s economy and in our world, and our enemy would LOVE to tear it down, diminish it, and devalue it. We must stand up, believe, and live out the Biblical realities in order to bring glory to God, for the thriving of families, and giving hope to a dying world in need of a model to follow.

Any questions up to this point?

None of this is done in a vacuum, and all of this is much easier when a husband plays his role well. That is what we will address next week.