

Gift of a Spirit Filled Wife

Ephesians 5:21-24

An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. Prov. 31:10

Introduction: One of the best and most loving things to do for someone is to tell them the truth and to consider how to deliver the truth in a careful, clear, and thoughtful way. It does a man riddled with an incurable disease no good to tell him everything will be ok and send him on his way, just so you don't have to break the hard news to him. We preach the Scriptures not because they are easy to hear but because they tell us the truth, clarify what is wrong, and give us the solution. The issue is not a debate over the veracity of a passage but whether we will believe and respond. Thus we do not sugar coat or soften Scripture but try to communicate in its fullest, not making excuses for God but also trying to explain the reasons behind hard commands where God gives it to us. This is especially true when we talk about our Biblical understanding of marriage and **marriage roles in particular.** These have been misunderstood, misapplied, and misappropriated for millennia, leaving a wake of disappointment and heartache. So before we get into the roles of marriage, we have to understand why God created marriage and how sin has affected it so negatively so we will know how a redeemed marriage will function.

Marriage is:

- **God's Clear Plan For the Good of Mankind and Thriving of Civilization**

The purpose, plan, and goal of marriage was not unclear nor was it complicated. God created marriage as the foundation for how a culture and society would not only be built but how it would thrive. The FAMILY was not a result of mankind figuring out a secret code for success but God's gift to humanity and the source of joy, goodness, pleasure, perpetuation, and ultimately, the extension of God's glory throughout the globe. God made mankind in His own image (Gen. 1:26) and commissioned them to have dominion over the created order (1:26-27) and to fill the earth (1:28). The way Adam and Eve would glorify God was in enjoying Him, growing their family, spreading out across all of the land, and using all that He created to reflect back praise and thankfulness to Him.

So marriage was the conduit to glorifying God, and as Adam was presented with Eve for the first time, his initial thought was NOT this is now someone to serve me, do my laundry, and meet my physical needs. After naming all the animals and observing all that God had created, nothing corresponded to him in personhood, so when Eve was in front of him, he cried out with delight in Covenant language ("bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh"), without shame, and with an understanding of his role in God's creation and her support and help in that. He could not accomplish what God had for him without her, and he was given the role of leading both spiritually (with knowledge given to him by God alone about eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil - **Gen. 2:16-17**) and physically as he would work the ground to bring forth its fruit. Eve did not see Adam and say, "great, now I've lost my identity as a woman since I'm here to help him!?" She did not resent his leadership but embraced her role as given by God to be Adam's helper, supporter, and encourager, so that together they could manifest the mandate set out by God for all people, since built into the beginning was a perpetual command that marriage should continue ("therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh - Gen. 2:24). It is significant that this command is placed at the end of **Genesis 2**, before sin entered the world and before conflict in marriage was felt. Marriage and family is good because God created it to be so.

But everything that God creates for our good is attacked. What did Satan attack first? The married couple and their roles. Instead of trusting her husband, Eve listened to the Serpent and took the role of leader by eating the fruit. Instead of leading his wife in a loving and strong way, Adam failed to lovingly say “no” and clarify the deception of Satan, and even participated in the sin of his wife, plunging humanity, marriage, and family into a complicated tailspin from that day on. What was the deception of the Deceiver? Did God really say? Don’t you know that God does not want you to be like Him? Happiness is found when you can act like God, not be subservient to Him!!????!! This is the same ploy he uses today, and his assault on marriage and family has only intensified today, knowing that as goes the family/home, so goes culture, society, and mankind as a whole.

- **Always Attacked, Counterfeited, and Downgraded**

Under the guise of love, freedom, and progressive thought, marriage is targeted relentlessly by our enemy. Destroy the foundation, the whole house comes down. This has happened by redefinition of marriage, no longer between a man and woman, but literally between whatever two people (or other) declare their love or desire. This happens by devaluing marriage itself with the proliferation of divorce and the ease by which one can “get out” of a marriage. It happens by rebellion against God’s design and

beauty of sex, which was created for enjoyment within marriage and now has little to no rails restraining it. It happens by denigrating the God given ability of women giving birth to children who are made in God’s image, and substituting that joyful gift with murder or refusing to engage in order to be more like a man. It has not happened by accident. There was a polarizing effect on women after the Fall in Genesis 3, both the downgrade of women and their personhood and value, which has been seen historically, (even in Jesus’ day when a prayer of Jewish men was, “God, thank you for not making me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman”), which is opposite of how Adam saw Eve, and the push for wives to take leadership from her husband (Genesis 3:16 - “your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you”). Both the downgrade of women and a wives response to her husband are sourced in the Fall, a result of sin nature, and are only solved in the gospel.

- **Exceptionally Hard**

Marriage is one of the greatest gifts we've been given, and a source of exceptional joy and happiness. Because we are all born with a sin nature and have inherited this from Adam and Eve, marriage is hard. It always has been. In fact, as we look at statistics of why couple's divorce today, we can see these issues in our own marriages or at least can see how these happen. In an article entitled “Causes of Divorce: 13 of the most common reasons”, Moriel Berger listed these as reasons: 1) Conflict, arguing, irretrievable breakdown in the relationship, 2) Lack of commitment, 3) Infidelity/Affairs, 4) Distance in the relationship/lack of physical intimacy, 5) Communication problems, 6) Abuse - verbal, emotional and physical, 7) Realization that one's spouse has different values and morals.

What is interesting is that at the bottom of the list were financial issues, marrying too young, or lack of shared interests. Now it would be foolish to say a married couple has experienced all of these, but it'd be equally foolish to think a couple has not experienced SOME of these. Marriage is hard. It's placing two sinful people into a close, intimate, and personal proximity with each other, and thus sinful behavior WILL come out. This is why the gospel is the only resource that can transform a marriage, reversing or minimizing the effects of the curse, and getting back to what God had intended for marriage to start. We often tell couples in counseling, “We are not trying to help you get back to something in the past but have you experience something radically new in the future”. The ONLY way to do this is to yield ourselves to God's loving commands, gentle leadership, and total mastery.

The next two weeks we want to tell the truth about marriage, seeking to understand what God has given us to experience healthy, God honoring, joyful, complete, and glorifying marriages. This week we will focus on wives (since Paul does) first, and then next week a look at a call to husbands.

Before diving into the next text, we have to once again connect what we looked at last week. Every believer is given the Holy Spirit at the point of salvation, as He indwells (Rom. 8:9), baptizes us into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), and seals us as a guarantee of future glorification (2 Cor. 5:5). Since we have ALL of the Spirit, the question is about *filling and walking with* rather than having MORE or a second blessing. We have all of Him, but does He have all of us? **Being filled with the Spirit** will have specific results in our lives, starting with a new song of redemption that we will sing to each other and from our heart our Lord. Singing is a response in worship, not worship itself. Spirit filled believers will be thankful in everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. In thanking God for everything, even hard circumstances and trials, we will express faith and trust in His goodness rather than complaining against His character and sovereignty. But, there is a **third prominent result of being filled with the Spirit that every believer SHOULD exercise, and plays out specifically in marriage**. That is the issue of submission.

A Spirit Filled Life Submits Freely

“...submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ.”

Meaning of Submission – Finally, a Spirit filled life will be willing to submit to the authority placed over us. One of the most misunderstood words in Scripture, submission to God given authority is a gift and gives freedom to His people. Submission has nothing to do with one party being **better, more valuable, more capable, more intelligent, or stronger**, but rather to a structure of authority. The word “upotasso” was a military term that meant to “line or arrange oneself under, or order oneself under a leader”. A Biblical usage has to do with **willingly placing oneself under the authority of another**. It must be WILLING, since forced submission is no longer a Spirit filled venture. Placing ourselves under means we humble ourselves before the Lord, and then recognizes the source of authority. To illustrate that submission is a glorious thing, **Christ Himself submitted to His Father, even though they are One** (John 10:30). Christ willingly placed Himself under the leadership of earthly parents (Luke 2:49) and His eternal Father (Matt. 26:39, 42; Mark 14:36) in the Garden of Gethsemane before the cross, and did it all out of humility and emptying Himself (Phil. 2:5-9). Christ’s submission to His Father gives us a model to follow and validates the command.

Mutuality of Submission – Notice that EVERYONE SUBMITS. We will study how wives specifically do this next week, but the main command is here in v. 21 and is picked up particularly in v. 22. We all submit first and foremost to the Lord (James 4:7), to governing authorities placed there by God (Rom. 13; 1 Pet. 2:13; Titus 3:1), the church to Christ (Eph. 5:24), and members in the church to God ordained elders (Heb. 3:17). All authority is ordained by God, so we submit to these as an expression of submission to Him. Submission is hard, since we don’t like authority. Submission is impossible without first **yielding to the Lordship of Christ and being filled with the Spirit**. But, submission to authority is no small thing and imperative for every believer to humble themselves in those areas. What’s at stake?

Motivation for Submission – We submit out of “reverence” to Christ according to the text, but truly, the word here is “fear”. We have a healthy, full, and deep fear of Jesus Christ because He is our ultimate authority. This is less than terror but more than mere reverence. We seek to please Him, are secure in Him, love Him, but also understand that we will give an account before Him. The same idea of **fearing the Lord** is used four times in the NT: 1) **Acts 9:31** – The church multiplied as they walked in the *Fear of*

the Lord and the Holy Spirit; 2) 2 Cor. 5:11 – It's in knowing the *Fear of the Lord* that motivates us to persuade others in the gospel; 3) **Romans 3:18** – The problem with the unconverted is that there is *no Fear of the Lord* in their eyes; 4) **2 Cor. 7:1** – The *Fear of God* is what helps bring holiness to completion. All of submission fixes its eyes on Christ, both for the strength to do it, the goal in it, and the healthy fear through it.

Now, this concludes Paul's section on *walking in wisdom*, which includes understanding God's will and making the best use of our time, which concludes all the "walk" sections of Ephesians. Now Paul gets into the nitty gritty of life and relationships, starting with marriage.

A Spirit Filled Wife Submits Freely (Eph. 5:22-24)

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

Meekness of Submission in Marriage

As we have seen, observed, and experienced, *submission* of any kind is foreign to our nature and counter-intuitive in our thinking. We do NOT naturally submit to the authority of another nor do we typically love others selflessly. That is why the call to submit is by NATURE *counter-cultural* and can only be accomplished in the transformative power in the gospel. If you were to go to a trained counselor who has taken classes on marriage and family and has a degree, yet does not understand what the Bible says, they may tell you that marriage is a 50/50 proposition, a give a take, an exercise in a *quid pro quo* back and forth. It may be stated that if you are not happy, divorce may be an option. But, we know that any counsel that is worth its salt before God has to embrace **meekness**, a power under control, in exercising what God has called us to.

- **Submission in marriage is "limited"** – Notice that a wife is not to submit to just any husband, but particularly to her OWN husband. When a woman gets married, there is a transfer of oversight and leadership from her father to her husband, which is often symbolized by a dad literally handing his daughter off in a wedding ceremony. We've already seen that submission is **willingly coming under the leadership of another**, and that is exactly the commitment of a wife when she gets hitched. She is giving up her right to singleness, to make independent decisions, and to become a supportive helper to her husband in a covenant relationship. This is **exclusive**. She does not go outside the marriage bed for comfort and looks to her husband now for leadership in the spiritual and physical realm. In a healthy marriage, this is clear and obvious. In hard or unequal marriages, this becomes extremely difficult. But, let's look a bit deeper at the call of submission.
- **Submission in marriage is "somewhat" mutual** – **1 Corinthians 7:1-5**, Paul gives a beautiful command to married couples. When a husband and wife enter into a marriage bond, they both **give up their rights and authority over their own body**. Marriage is the fusing together of two separate people into one, and only truly works when each one commits 100% to play their roles, but also to be loving, humble, gentle, and kind with each other. The goal of any spouse in marriage is the helping of the other become more like Christ, to seek THEIR greatest good, and to serve selflessly. In this, both a husband and wife give up their rights to their own authority.
- **Submission recognizes authority and responsibility rather than control and totalitarianism** – When a wife submits, she willingly says that her husband has the God given mantle of

leadership, authority from Him, and the high call of responsibility to guide her and the whole family in Christ. In this, she recognizes that her role is to **uphold his**, to help and free him up to lead, since his thriving leadership will mean the thriving of her individually and the family as a whole. **What is the opposite of this kind of submission in marriage?** Four times in Proverbs the issue of a **quarrelsome wife** is mentioned, and she is compared to a continual dripping water (Prov. 19:13; 27:15) and that it would be better for her husband to live in the corner of the housetop (Prov. 21:9; 25:24). A supportive helper has strong opinions, intellectual insight, and wise counsel, but stops short of nagging and being argumentative when her husband seeks to make decisions for the family. Will he “be wrong” sometimes? Absolutely. A submissive wife will not hold that over him but help him make the next best decision.

- **Submission does not restrict from being high capacity in life** – We can wrongly equate a submissive wife with one who is quiet and unknown in the corner of whatever room she is in. The woman of **Proverbs 31** was no church mouse. She was strong, industrious, intelligent, hard working, entrepreneurial, and known for her beauty. But, her husband **trusts in her and does not lack gain** (31:11). He was known in the gates of the city among the elders (31:23). In other words, she was strong but upheld his role in the family and the city. This allowed him to not only recognize her excellence (31:10), but praise her for her **fear of the Lord**. (31:28-30)
- **Submission first and foremost submits to Christ** – This is the ballgame in submission in marriage. Notice the text says, “**as to the Lord**”. (Col. 3:18 – “*as is fitting to the Lord*”). Our whole lives in Christ are summed up as yielding ourselves, freely, joyfully, and fully, to HIS LORDSHIP! He is the head of the body since HE is our Savior. The head directs where the body follows, and Christ did not make a mistake in calling us to submit in marriage. **But I'm in a loveless marriage and my husband fails in _____? What do I do??!!** 1 Peter 3:1-6 gives us the answer, since Christ Himself gave us the model:

“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,² when they see your respectful and pure conduct. ³Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—⁴but 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 (⁵valuable). For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands,⁶ as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.”

Jesus was not asking wives to do anything that He was unwilling to do, in the sense that He suffered for us, leaving us an example to follow (1 Pet. 2:21), entrusting Himself to the Father, never firing back when hurt, but believing that there was a greater joy to be had in obedience to God than to take things into His own hands. Does this mean marriage is always a model of suffering??!! I hope not. But I do know for some it feels that way. And the solution is not to run but to trust, not to respond in kind but be kind, not to fear unhappiness but operate in the fear of Christ, who sees all.

Model of Submission in Marriage

Paul leaves a model for wives to follow, and its none other than how the church (all of us) submits to Christ. Christ is not only the example for husbands (we'll take at least one week to consider the call to husbands) but to wives. He is a **provider, protector, and Savior who can be trusted wholeheartedly**. When Christ calls us to do hard things like suffer and walk through trials, we know that there is a divine

purpose and good for us in the end. When He calls wives to submit, he does so **extensively, "in everything"**, short of something sinful. This leaves no wiggle room for debate or negotiating, but simply leaves EVERY wife, regardless of the merit of their husband, in desperate need of grace.

How do you do this if this has not been a regular habit of obedience?

1. You must be **filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)** – This means you must be saved to have the Spirit and yield yourself to the leading of Christ and His Word each moment of each day.
2. You must **learn from the mature women of the church (Titus 2:5)** - One of the greatest gifts to the church are its mature saints. Find a woman who has been married to the same husband for decades and ask them what they have learned about submitting to a sinful and imperfect man.
3. You must **entrust yourself to God and Christ who bore your sin on the cross (1 Pet. 2:23-25)** – Not just trust, but entrust yourself to your loving Father who judges justly and to Christ who paid the price of YOUR sin, giving a salvation that cannot be taken away and a faith that is so precious and valuable that God will refine it.

Marriage is incredible, and godly marriages are a beacon to the world that Jesus is better. But, this means we must operate in marriage the way God has called us, including wives submitting to husbands as unto the Lord. Next week we'll look at how husbands embody the love of Christ in their marriages, which provides loving leadership and opportunity for wives to be secure and valued.