

# The Christian Family

## Chapter 3: The Biblical Duties of Wives

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If a wife is to be obedient to God, she must first understand her God-given role in society and the family. In our post-Christian culture with its rejection of divine revelation and ethical absolutes, women have become increasingly misguided. The God-given urge for family and children still exists. However, this creational reality is sublimated to an autonomous, sinful, hedonistic, selfish view of life. Many pagan women put off marriage and children into the distant future to concentrate on careers, fun, and sexual fulfillment. Even marriage itself has been redefined in a pagan manner. Marriage is no longer seen as a glorious God-ordained method of serving Christ's kingdom. It is now viewed as a purely human institution that is convenient for increasing romance and/or one's own selfish needs. When the relationship is no longer "romantic" or "fulfilling", one's partner is cast aside even though the children involved in a divorce will suffer for many years, perhaps for a lifetime.

Many women today have accepted the lie of feminism that portrays being a homemaker, placing the husband and children first and rejecting the career path to stay home for the sake of the children as a form of slavery. Feminism teaches that true fulfillment lies outside the home in a challenging and lucrative career. Sadly, the rejection of the biblical concept of marriage in favor of secular humanistic nonsense has been a disaster for woman and families. Not only do we now have rampant divorce, adultery, illegitimacy, spousal abuse and marital abandonment, we also have a generation of children who are being raised by disinterested minimum wage daycare workers. Further, because women cannot deny creational reality (i.e. their God-given nature as woman), those who have based their lives on the lies of feminism are unfulfilled and often miserable. The rejection of God's word for secular humanism and feminism carries with it its own sanctions by God. Given the importance of wives and mothers in God's plan for society and culture; and given the disaster that the rejection of the Christian world-view has meant for families and nations, the study of the biblical duties of wives is very important. Women will only find true freedom when they believe in Christ and submit their lives to God's holy law.

As we study the duty of the wife, we must keep in mind that although many commands are directed to wives in Scripture, husbands are still responsible for the behavior of their wives. This means that husbands have a responsibility to make sure that wives understand their biblical duties and put these duties into practice. In other words, Christian wives can never be considered in isolation of their husbands. Therefore, all the injunctions to wives in Scripture are in a sense directed to both husbands and wives.

In our consideration of the duty of wives we will examine three main areas: the central command to wives (to be subject to their own husbands), the biblical reasons for this submission, and the nature of the wife's submission. Because the scriptural reasons for the submission of the wife to her own husband mirror the reasons already given in the chapter on the duty of the husband this section will be brief and will focus on areas not previously considered. After we examine the submission of the wife, we will consider other duties (e.g., bearing children, sexual duties, etc.).

The central command to wives is submission to their own husbands. Paul writes, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything... Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:22-24, 33). The word (*hypotassesthe*) translated “submit” in verse 22 (the Majority and Received text)<sup>1</sup> is a present middle imperative of *hypotass*. This verb when used of the military means to place or rank under (Plybius).<sup>2</sup> When it is used by Paul in the middle voice it means “to subject one’s self, to obey, to submit to one’s control; to yield to one’s admonition or advice.”<sup>3</sup> Most modern versions (ASV, NASB, RSV, NEB) prefer the translation “be subject” or “be in subjection.” Webster’s unabridged dictionary defines the verb subject as: “to place under... to bring under the authority or control of.”<sup>4</sup> Christian wives are commanded to submit to the authority of their own husbands in the Lord. The same command is repeated in Colossians 3:18: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.” “The expression ‘as is fitting’ (*hs anken*) means that the submission of the wife to her own husband is appropriate Christian behavior. It is as it should be for it is proper as a Christian duty. The wife who in accordance with Scripture submits herself to her own husband is living her life in accordance with proper Christian behavior. Paul’s fitting, points to the time of their entrance upon the Christian life.”<sup>5</sup> The apostle clearly expects every professing Christian wife to immediately begin to submit to their own husbands in the Lord the moment they become a believer. Submission on the part of the wife to her own husband is not optional, but is a necessary aspect of Christian behavior.

## Some Common Questions

Before we turn our attention to the biblical reasons for the wife’s submission to her husband, there are three common questions regarding the wife’s duty that need to be addressed. First, shouldn’t the passages which teach the wife’s submission be interpreted in light of Ephesians 5:21? Second, doesn’t the submission of the wives as taught by Paul indicate that in the apostle’s mind women are inferior to men? Third, wasn’t the apostle Paul in his teaching on the submission of the wife merely reflecting the commonly held views of Greek, Roman and Jewish society?

(1) Does Ephesians 5:21 (“submitting to one another in the fear of God”) imply that husbands also must submit to their wives; that the husband does not have a God-given authority over his wife; that marriage and the church are totally egalitarian in the modern sense of that term? No, absolutely not. To argue that the explicit teaching of Paul in Ephesians 5:22-6:9 regarding wives and husbands, children and fathers, servants and masters can be ignored of the basis of Ephesians 5:21 is Scripture twisting of the worst sort. It is obvious that in the section

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<sup>1</sup> The verb *hypotassesthe* (v. 22) is not found in the early manuscripts. Even if one rejects the TR reading of verse 22, the meaning of the passage remains the same because the verb is easily supplied from the preceding *hypotassomeni* (present middle participle) in verse 21. Such constructions are common in Greek and are often used by Paul.

<sup>2</sup> See G. Abbot-Smith, *A Manual Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1977 [1937]), 463.

<sup>3</sup> J. H. Thayer, *The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon* (Lafayette, IN: Apya, 1979 [1889]), 645.

<sup>4</sup> General Supervisor, Jean L. McKechnie, *Webster’s New Twentieth Century of the English Language Unabridged* (New York: Collins World, 1978), 1813.

<sup>5</sup> Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946 [1887]), 3:507.

dealing with the Christian household (5:22-6:9), that wives are subject to their husbands, children to parents, slave to masters and not vice versa. Given this fact, and given the teaching of both Old and New Testaments on this matter, Ephesians 5:21 must be interpreted as teaching a general submission to the rights, needs, and wishes of the others.<sup>6</sup> Did not our Lord wash the disciples' feet (Jn 13:14-15), and then instruct the disciples to do the same for one another? Similarly, Paul instructed Christians to live "in humble mindedness each counting the other better than himself" (Phil. 2:3). He also says in Romans 12:10, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another." Believers are to place other Christians' welfare above their own. This means that we must be willing to subordinate our own personal interests to those of others in the church. This mutual submission is needed in the church for cooperation, peace and the overall sanctification of the body. This interpretation is supported by a very similar passage in I Peter where subjection to each other is coupled with humility. "Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility" (5:5). Using Ephesians 5:21 to overthrow the Biblical structure of authority in the Church and family would not only contradict several clear portions of Scripture, it also would make Paul on anarchist.<sup>7</sup> Such a view obviously is incompatible with evangelical Christianity.

(2) But doesn't the submission of the wife clearly imply the inferiority of women to men? No, this was not the apostle's intent. Paul refers to a functional subordination of wives to husbands that is ordained of God and built into the very fabric of creation. He is not making a statement regarding a woman's personal value or ontological being. The death-blow to the popular feminist conception that Paul was a sexist is the biblical teaching regarding the economic trinity. The economic trinity refers to the triune God's division of labor in creation and redemption. The Father sends the Son who voluntarily humbles Himself in coming to earth to suffer and die as the divine - human mediator. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit who then applies Christ's perfect redemption to the elect. The fact that Jesus submits Himself to the Father's will does not mean (and theologically cannot mean) that He is inferior in any way. Therefore, the fact that God has placed wives in a place of functional subordination to their own husbands should never be interpreted as denigrating to women. To do so is to denigrate (indirectly) Christ Himself. Further, when one understands how Christian husbands are to treat their wives, all conceptions of a wife's inferiority immediately vanish. Because feminists have an axe to grind, they ignore the plain teaching of Scripture.

(3) The most common view held today by secular humanists, modernists and many neo-evangelicals is that Paul's teaching on the wife is merely a reflection of ancient Greek, Roman and Jewish culture. The implication of such a position is that Paul's injunctions to wives are culturally conditioned and thus do not apply to our modern, more enlightened time. Is it biblically possible that conservative Christians have been duped into following outmoded sexist customs from patriarchal cultures? No, not at all! There are a number of reasons why such a view must be rejected by all Bible-believing Christians. First, the idea that Paul was issuing moral imperatives based on arbitrary, sexist, unjust customs presupposes that the Bible is not divinely inspired and infallible. If Paul was teaching things that were culturally conditioned (in an unethical or unjust way), wrong or immoral, then the Bible is a book liable to error and cannot be trusted at any single point. Such a view would mean the death of biblical religion and should not be entertained for one moment by any Bible-believing Christian.

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<sup>6</sup> William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967, 68) Part 2, 244.

<sup>7</sup> A common and perfectly acceptable interpretation of this passage among older commentators is that Paul is simply telling believers to submit to other Christians in all the natural, civil and church relations that occur in life.

Second, the Bible gives many reasons for the headship of the husband and the submission of the wife and not one is based on custom, culture or personal opinion (e.g.[1] God's ordained order of authority [I Cor. 11:3];[2] Adam was created first [I Tim. 2:14]; [3] the woman [Eve] originated from the man [Adam] [Gen. 2:21-22, I Cor. 11:8]; [4] the woman-wife was created as a help-mate to the man-Adam [Gen.2:18; I Cor. 11:9]; [5] Eve was deceived and fell into transgression [I Tim. 2:14]; [6] the covenant headship of the husband [I Cor. 14:34-35]). When Paul looks back to the marriage relationship as set up by God before the fall and before the development of sin as a justification for the headship of the husband and submission of the wife, it is crystal clear that the Greek, Roman, or Jewish cultures of his day had nothing to do with his injunctions to husbands and wives. Further, if the biblical teaching regarding husbands and wives is culturally conditioned, sexist and immoral then what are we to make of Paul's comparison of Christ and the church with the relationship of husbands to wives. Would Paul set up a parallel between Christ and that which is sinful and based on corrupt pagan cultures? No, obviously not. Marriage (with Adam as head and Eve as help-mate) was made by God from the very beginning to reflect and teach humanity about the relationship of Christ and the church. Feminists can complain all they want regarding the biblical teaching on marriage and the family. Their attempts, however, to circumvent the teaching of Scripture on this matter are themselves culturally conditioned, immoral, unbiblical and anti-family.

## Biblical Reasons for the Submission of the Wife

Before one examines the nature of biblical submission, one must first consider the biblical reasons for the wife's submission to her own husband. Since most of the reasons given in Scripture are the flip side of the covenant headship of the husband and thus have already been discussed in a previous chapter, this section will be brief and will focus on areas not previously considered.

Note that the first four reasons are all related to marriage as a creation ordinance of God.

(1) The Bible teaches that Eve is to submit to the husband because Adam was created first by God. Paul, writing under divine inspiration, gives significance to the fact that Adam was created before Eve. He writes, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God... For man is not from woman, but woman from man" (1 Cor. 11:3, 8). "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Tim. 1:12-13).

(2) Closely related to the previous point is the fact that the creation account says that Eve originated from Adam. Paul says, "For man is not from women, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man" (1 Cor. 11:8-9). "Adam was not in any way derived from (*ek*) a woman; he was created directly by God. The opposite is the fact regarding woman. Eve was derived from (*ek*) Adam: 'bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.'"<sup>8</sup>

The Genesis narrative reads, "And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place, Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Gen. 2:21-23). Eve's origination from Adam shows: the absolute unity of the human race from one ancestor (a crucial doctrine, cf. Rom, 5:18 ff.); that

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<sup>8</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), 443.

woman is not of inferior substance to man, therefore she is equal to him as a creature of God; that the marriage relationship creates a special unity relationally, sexually and as to purpose. Matthew Henry writes, “That the woman was made of a rib out of side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”<sup>9</sup>

(3) The last two points (Adam is created first; Eve is created second and originates from him) lead directly to the next reason for the submission of the wife. Eve was created for her husband to be a helpmate unto him. Paul says, “Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man” (1 Cor. 11:9). The creation narrative reads, “And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make a helper comparable to him’” (Gen 2:18). The placement of this verse in the creation account is very significant. Immediately after verse 18 it says (in verses 19 to 20) that God brought all the animals to Adam to see what he would call them. In the Hebrew mind-set, names are assigned to animals on the basis of the animals’ character. Therefore, for Adam naming the animals was not arbitrary but was based on empirical observations and careful analysis. Assigning names to each animal was a scientific endeavor. As all the animals passed before him, he would examine them closely. After careful thought, he would assign a name to each animal. It was during this time of study and reflection that Adam became very aware that of all the creation he was unique. In every species except man there was both male and female. It is likely that at this time Adam realized that he was incomplete in and of himself, that he needed a mate, a female counterpart. God providentially enabled Adam to understand his incompleteness and prepared him to meet his helpmate, his wife.

Adam’s need of a wife, a counterpart, is clearly seen in the dominion mandate. “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Gen. 1:27-28). God gives two assignments to Adam and Eve: procreation and dominion. Adam and Eve are given the responsibility to develop a worldwide, God-glorifying culture. They are given dominion over the creatures for their improvement and development under God. Keep in mind that at this time, dominion does not involve killing animals for food. Only after the flood (Gen, 9:3) is dominion extended to include animal consumption. It is obvious that Adam could not fulfill the cultural mandate without a wife. Procreation and the raising of children (a godly seed) are necessary to fill up the earth. The wife is necessary as a helpmate in the task of dominion. In procreation and raising a family, the wife plays a crucial role. She completes what is lacking in the man.

The word “helpmate” (KJV) or a “helper comparable to” (NKJV) expresses the notion of complementarity. The wife Eve is a helper matching or corresponding to her husband Adam. She is suitable for him. Together they make a perfect pair because they are both designed by God to complement each other, to form a perfect whole, a harmonious team. The man and the woman are different; yet these differences are designed by God to compliment each other, to work together in such a manner as to make them stronger and more effective together than if they were apart. When feminists interpret this creation narrative as teaching that women are created second as mere servants of the man, they are totally missing the point of this passage. Adam and Eve need each other. While it is true that there is a God-ordained order of authority in the family, the story of the creation of Eve exalts the role of wife and mother. Matthew Henry writes, “Yet man being made last of the creatures, as the best and most excellent of all, Eve’s being made

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing, n.d.) 1:20.

after Adam, and out of him, puts an honour upon that sex, as the glory of the man, I Cor. xi. 7. If a man is the head, she is the crown, a crown to her husband, the crown of the visible creation. The man was dust refined, but the woman was dust double-refined, one remove [sic] further from the earth.”<sup>10</sup>

When Adam saw Eve, he knew that she was perfectly suitable to answer his needs and desires. The wife is to be a helper suitable for her husband. She is to compliment him and make up what is lacking in him. Together in marriage God makes them a complete whole and together they are perfectly suited to carry out the dominion mandate. The submission of the wife is rooted in the very fabric of creation. Eve was made for Adam to help him and complete him. Therefore, the only way that a woman can find true fulfillment and meaning as God created her is to become a loving submissive wife to a man who is under the loving lordship of Christ.

(4) The submission of the wife to her own husband is part of God’s ordained order of authority in creation. (This point is a theological statement that affirms everything we have already discussed). Paul writes, “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3). The apostle says that God has established a certain order of authority in creation. There is God the Father, God the Son; then there is the husband (the man) and the wife (the woman). When Paul speaks of the Son submitting to the Father, he of course is referring to what theologians call the economic function of the persons of the Godhead in creation and redemption. The fact that the headship of the husband and the submission of the wife is part of God’s ordained order of authority means that when husbands refuse to lead or when wives refuse to submit, they in a sense are rejecting the authority of God Himself. There is nothing in God’s creation that is beyond the authority of His law-word. To deny God’s ordained order of authority for husbands and wives is to deny reality. It is to deny the very meaning and fabric of our existence.

(5) Another reason that Scripture gives for the subjection of the wife to her own husband is the historical fact that Eve was deceived and fell first. Paul writes, “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim. 2:11-14). The apostle first appeals to the creation ordinance of marriage (v.13; i.e. the God-given purpose and roles of the husband and wife). Then Paul underlines and illustrates the necessity of these God-given roles by pointing to the fall narrative in which the wife ignored her God-given role by acting as the leader of the household. Eve ignored her role of submission; did not consult with her husband and led her husband into transgression. Note God’s rebuke of Adam in Genesis 3:17, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife...” Although Adam was fully responsible for his transgression because he sinned willfully, his sin did not come about because of deception but because he submitted to his deceived, sinful wife. “Eve usurped the headship in the fall; Adam, who was the head, became the feet and followed Eve in the *parabasis*, in the stepping aside.”<sup>11</sup> “God had given her, not for authority and rule, but for kindly ministrations; to be a helpmate by his side, not a directress to control his judgment or determine for him the course of life.”<sup>12</sup> (A number of other reasons for the submission of the wife [e.g., the plain teaching of Scripture regarding

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 1:19.

<sup>11</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, and to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1937), 568-569.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: I and II Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956 [1874]), 130.

covenant headship; the etymology of the words for husband and wife; the analogy of the marriage relationship and Christ and the church; the requirements for church office; the teaching of God's law.] have already been considered in the chapter regarding the duties of the husbands).

## Some Implications of the Submission of the Wife

The Bible is crystal clear in its teaching that the wife has a different and subordinate role in the marriage relationship. Although created in the image of God and equal to the man ontologically, the wife was created as a helpmate to the man. This teaching has many implications for understanding the roles of husbands and wives.

One thing it teaches us is that the woman is to assist her husband in the task of godly dominion. The husband is to glorify God and extend dominion over the earth by means of his calling in life and the wife is to help her husband be the best he can be (in a biblical manner) in his particular calling. This means that the wife's "career" and calling in life is not found outside the home but is centered on her husband and children. Note how this teaching is assumed by the apostle Paul writing under divine inspiration. "Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (1 Tim. 5:14). The natural God-given calling of women is to get married, bear children and manage the house. "'To rule the house' means as the wife and mother in the home, to manage the household affairs. This is the domain and province of women in which no man can compete with her."<sup>13</sup> Calvin writes, "And St. Paul rehearses it now again. As if he said, that a woman should give herself to be at the church all the day long and to pray and sing, this kind of life would not God so well like of, as if being married, she were with patience very willing to do her duty in nourishing her children, in watching for them, in nurturing them, and taking all pains and care to instruct them. If a woman gives herself to this, and makes this her end to serve God, knowing that it is he that hath called her to such a charge, St. Paul says, that this shall be greater, and better liked of, for God requires obedience"<sup>14</sup>

Note also Paul's pastoral teaching to Titus on this issue. He writes, "The older women likewise, that they be...teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Tit. 2:3-5). Contrary to modern feminized culture, the word of God gives top priority to home life. Not only does Paul have more to say to young women than any other class, he instructs the older women to teach the younger women regarding their domestic duties. "So much depends on the women, in great part on the young women, of the church. The world will to a great extent judge the churches by the character which the gospel produces in women."<sup>15</sup>

Paul says that wives are to be dedicated to their husbands and children ("loving husbands" and "loving children"). They are to be "keepers at home" (*oikourous*). Einwechter writes,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 676.

<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons on Timothy and Titus* (Carlisle, PA.: Banner of Truth, 1983 [1579]) 494. The spelling has been modernized by this author.

<sup>15</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and Philemon*, 913.

This word is derived from two Greek words. The first, *oikos* means a house, a dwelling, or, by metonymy, a household or family. The second, *ouros*, refers to a keeper, watcher or guardian, i.e. one who has the oversight and responsibility for something. Thus, the basic significance of *oikourous* is that of a “housekeeper,” that is, one who watches over a household and family, seeing to it that all members are cared for, and all things maintained in good order. *Oikourous* is used only in the New Testament in Titus 2:5; therefore, in seeking to accurately discern its meaning we must look to the Greek literature of the New Testament era. There, the word *oikourous* meant watching or keeping the house. It was employed in reference to a watchdog and to a rooster, but more germane to the context of Titus 2:5, indicate the mistress of the house. Furthermore, it was specifically used in praise of a good wife. Interestingly *oikourous* is utilized contemptuously of a man who refused to go out to war, designating him a “stay-at-home” man. “The verbal form, *oikoureo*, meant to watch or keep the house. It was used of men to indicate those who stayed at home to avoid military service. Other closely related words such as 1) *oikourema*, meant keeping the house and staying at home, and was used to refer to women as the “stay-at-homes”; 2) *oikouria*, referred to women as those employed in the work of housekeeping; 3) *oikourios*, meant the wages or rewards for the work of keeping the house, but also designated, significantly, keeping children within the doors of the house, i.e. keeping them at home.”<sup>16</sup>

“The ancients, both Jews and Gentiles, esteemed the stay-at-home wife.”<sup>17</sup>

The modern ideal of the career woman who works outside the home and places her children in daycare or with a teenage babysitter is clearly unbiblical. Such a notion is a product of modern feminism and is anti-children and anti-family. The wife’s kingdom or domain is the home. Being a “stay-at-home” wife is a Christian woman’s God-given calling and, contrary to feminism’s egalitarian propaganda, there is nothing more important, needed or fulfilling than staying at home loving, nurturing, teaching, and disciplining the next generation of Christians. What possibly could be more important than that? “Women’s greatest service to the race is that of motherhood. She may still do voluntary work that does not interfere with her duty to her husband and children; but she is not free to assume another life-work.”<sup>18</sup>

Paul says that the older women who are battle tested and experts in the domestic sphere are to teach the younger women to stay at home in order to be diligent homemakers. The apostle is not instructing young married women to stay at home and watch soap operas and game shows while the children are off being indoctrinated at the state school. This means that a wife who is lazy, who does not keep a clean and tidy house, who is lax in her home schooling duties is disobeying God. Being a good wife and mother is hard work, especially if there are many little

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<sup>16</sup> William Einwechter, “Keepers at Home” in *Chalcedon Report* (Vallecito, CA: May, 1999). Einwechter’s source for his analyses of the Greek word *oikourous* is: Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford, 1940), 1205. The Greek variant for *oikoureo* (the Received Text and the Majority Text [or the Byzantine/Traditional Text]) is *oikourgous* (modern critical editions of the Greek New Testament) which means “workers at home.” Following this variant, modern translations such as the NIV render this word “to be busy at home.” This translation, however, can give the false impression that women can pursue a career outside the home as long as they are busy when they are at home. The Greek word *oikourgous* does not teach anything that contradicts the application of the better reading *oikourous*. Both Greek words teach that women are to fulfill their God-given responsibilities in the home. Obviously a woman who works outside the home is not a “home worker.” The NIV translation is defective and misleading. Being busy at home is a good application of being a “home worker” but by itself is liable to misunderstanding and abuse.

<sup>17</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1960), 241.

<sup>18</sup> D. S. Faris, “The Female Deacon, Animadversions on the Arguments of Synod’s Committee,” *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* XXVII:5 (May 1889), 140.

children. Therefore, it is very important that believers reject the statist feminist social conditioning rampant in our culture that denigrates the role of wife and mother. The Christian wife has a very important job to do in the family and society. Any attempt to portray this role as a waste of time, or unimportant, or as a state of patriarchal oppression is nothing but the lie of Satan. The reality is, it is the career women (who has moved up the company ladder and made a lot of money but who has no children) that is sad, unfulfilled and often exploited by men.

The biblical concept of the stay-at-home wife and mother raises a few important questions. First, in a modern culture where there are single mothers and divorced women with children that become Christians is it not impossible for such women to stay at home and focus on the domestic sphere? While it is true that women in such situations do not have any choice but to work to support their household, there are biblical principles that come into play during such a crisis. A Christian woman with children who does not have a husband should, if possible, move in with believing relatives. Paul says that one's extended family has a moral obligation to provide for their close relatives (cf. 1 Tim. 5:8). If one's extended family does not have the means to support a woman with several children then at least if the woman has to work the children will be nurtured by other Christian family members. If there are no Christian relatives but only hostile or indifferent pagan relatives then a woman in such a situation should be able to turn to the church for help. If the church is able to, it should provide the woman with food and shelter, so that she can stay home with her children. During this period of time, the elders should be actively helping her find another believing husband to support her and her children. If the church is small and struggling itself, effort should be made to provide godly women (preferably an older woman as in the order of widows) to watch over her children while she works. The church has a moral obligation to make sure that covenant children are not being warehoused in heathen day care centers. This diaconal ministry is much more important than financing a fancy new church building. The fact that we live in a wicked culture with many family problems does not negate Paul's teaching regarding the wife as a "keeper at home". When problems arise because of sin they must be dealt with biblically and compassionately.

Second, doesn't the Bible's teaching regarding the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 contradict Paul's requirement that wives are to be "keepers at home"? Doesn't this portion of Scripture encourage women to engage in a career outside the home at least on a part-time basis? The answer to these questions is no. A careful reading of Proverbs 31 actually supports the teaching of Paul for it presents the ideal wife and mother as a woman who works out of her home under the authority of her husband to provide extra income for the family. The woman of Proverb 31 does not have a job or career outside the home. She doesn't go to a factory or office to punch a time clock and work while others raise her children. The virtuous wife is an expert at providing good and clothing for her household (vs. 14, 21). She not only is a wise shopper but she also works hard with her hands (vs. 13, 15, 17-19, 22, 24). She works at home making products for the marketplace (linen garments and sashes, vs. 24). She uses the profits wisely. She helps the poor (v. 20), buys real estate and even plants a vineyard (v. 16). Bridges writes,

The standard of godliness exhibited here is not that of a religious recluse, shut up from active obligations, under the pretense of greater spirituality and consecration to God. There aren't any habits of monastic self-denial set forth here that have often been extolled as the highest point of Christian perfection. One half, at least, of the picture of the virtuous woman is occupied with her personal and domestic work. What a rebuke this also conveys to self-pleasing inactivity! Her many tasks show her praiseworthy and genuine simplicity of manners, and practical, yet liberal, thrift. This is indeed a difficult and rare attainment; economy without a miserly spirit;

seen and felt as little as possible, and conducted with all care and consideration for the comfort of her family.<sup>19</sup>

But let us look in greater detail at the features of the portrait before us. Her personal habits are full of energy. Manual labor, even menial service, in the old days, was the occupation of women of all ranks. Self-denial was a main principle, with the excellent wife leading her servants in hard work, no less than in dignity; expecting nothing from them, that she wouldn't do herself; ruling her household most efficiently through self-discipline. And so, she rounds up her tools and materials and puts them to work for her family. Instead of murmuring at some inconvenient demand, she sets a worthy example and delights in the work of her hands. She works early and late. The fruit of her work she turns to good account. In the days of Proverbs she sold the work to merchants. She puts her whole being into her work, ready to do any work befitting her sex and station.

The Bible teaches that the wife's top priority is the home. Running it wisely for God's glory under her husband's authority is her chief concern. The biblical paradigm of motherhood, however, does not mean that women are confined to the home. It is obvious from the Proverbs that wives were active in both buying and selling. Yet there is a major difference between making products at home as time permits and marketing them at one's own convenience and making a commitment to work for a corporation outside the home. With the Proverbs' model, the woman is in control and her family is never neglected. The wife in Proverbs 31 is in control of her schedule. Her home-based business affords her great flexibility. With the modern industrial and corporate model, there is no flexibility. The family must be placed on the back burner while the wife goes off to work. The biblical model rejects both modern feminism and the strict Islamic model in which women are not even permitted to go out in public. The wife of Proverbs 31 is an excellent biblical model of what it means to be a "keeper at home."

Perhaps the most common objection by professing Christians to the biblical doctrine that wives are to be "keepers at home" is that it is simply impossible to live in a modern (welfare-state, high-tax situation) society without two incomes. Although high taxes, real estate prices, transportation costs, etc. make it more difficult to make ends meet on one income alone it does not make it impossible. Christians can do quite well with the mother at home if they handle money wisely and biblically. If families stay out of debt and live simply much can be accomplished on a modest income. The problem with many professing Christians today is that they have bought into the American hedonistic materialistic concept of living which says: buy the biggest house you can; get a new car every two to three years; take an expensive vacation every year; run up your credit cards on dining out and various luxuries. The priority for Christian families must be extending godly dominion by raising a godly seed instead of seeking affluence, personal pleasures and unnecessary possessions. On your death bed will you be thinking about your shiny Lexus or your flesh and blood posterity?

The fact that the wife was created for the husband as a helpmeet unto him teaches us that women have a natural (built in by God) desire to fulfill their family function. This means that all attempts by modern society to eliminate gender differences and "stereotypes," to teach sex role reversals, to indoctrinate women to be like men, to establish an androgynous society; to redefine marriage in a secular humanistic egalitarian manner will not only ultimately fail but will cause untold harm to families, especially women and children. No matter how much women buy into

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Bridges, *The Book of Proverbs*, Revised by George F. Santa (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1978), 735.

feminist conditioning and no matter how perverted women are by sin, they still in most cases want a husband and children. The rush to have children by corporate career women, Hollywood leftists, and even lesbians (in their late 30s and early 40s) is not an accident. Women cannot deny creational reality without bringing misery upon their own heads.

Modern feminism and the sexual revolution has been an incredible disaster for American women. On the one hand society (e.g., through the public schools, universities, the media, the civil government, the major corporations, etc.) is telling women that men and women are basically the same and that women should become like men (e.g., career orientated, aggressive, sexually “liberated,” etc.); and, on the other hand society is telling women to be totally autonomous, to seek out perfect self-fulfillment and sexual freedom. The result of such indoctrination is that women are working much harder than before trying to satisfy both feminist propaganda and the creation imperative (i.e. being a wife and mother). Women have increasingly been treated with less respect and dignity for doing their most important task in life which is helping their husband and raising a family. Further, the so-called “sexual liberation” of modern society has basically been used by pagan men to treat women as sex objects and then toss them aside when boredom begins. Feminists have dug a large pit, shoveled in a layer of cow manure and jumped into the pit while praising their own accomplishments. They are victims of their own success. They do not understand that in rejecting the biblical paradigm of the family they are destroying their own lives. They are eliminating, or at least making much more difficult, their own happiness and fulfillment. Gallagher writes,

Here are some of the changes of the last twenty years: women are more likely to be abandoned by their husbands, to have to raise their children alone, to slip into poverty and to experience all the consequent degradations, to live in crowded apartments in dangerous parts of the city, to experience bad health and poor medical care, to be beaten, stabbed, raped, and robbed. Domestic violence is on the rise. So is sexual abuse of children while the sexual abuse of women has become the social norm. Reversing historic trends, women today work longer and harder than their mothers did and, under the stress, are more likely to collapse in nervous breakdowns. Fewer women can find suitable marriage partners and many who do marry will never have the children for which they long....<sup>20</sup>

When society fails to protect the family, it fails to protect women. Though motherhood is an increasingly dangerous proposition, women still want children and society still counts on us to bear and nurture the future generation. But regardless of whether our determined love for our children is a consequence of nature or nurture, it is very clear by now that men cannot be counted upon to share it. Why is it that the sexual freedom of the last twenty years hasn't produced hordes of impoverished single fathers? The answer is that the absence of strong cultural pressures to the contrary, men as a group do not find it impossible to abandon their children when the task of supporting them becomes very difficult or very unpleasant. This comes as a particular shock to a generation of women raised by men who were dependable, at a time when reliable husbands and fathers were the norm.

It is only in a society that is based on biblical law that women are protected socially, legally and economically. Laws against fornication and adultery (Ex. 20:14, 16-17, Dt. 22:13-21, 29; 23:17; Lev. 19:29; 21:9) protect women (and men) from exploitation and abandonment. In a Christian society there is a powerful social pressure placed upon both men and women to live

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<sup>20</sup> Maggie Gallagher, *Enemies of Eros: How the Sexual Revolution is Killing Family, Marriage, and Sex and What I Can Do About It* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 1989), 14, 16.

within their God-ordained roles. Men are tied to their families by law and social conditioning. Wives and children are respected and loved. Men know that if they use and mistreat their wives they will be social outcasts. They will be considered failures and cowards. Women in such a society who play the harlot and mistreat or neglect their children will suffer dire consequences. The Christian world and life view is the glue that in the past and present has held families together. It is ironic that husbands, wives and children are most happy and fulfilled when they place Christ first and work for His kingdom: and, most miserable when the self is placed on the throne. A society that rejects God and biblical law and defines marriage in terms of sexual appetites, arbitrary statist laws and feminist presuppositions will come under judgment and ruin.

## The Nature of the Submission of the Wife

The Bible not only teaches the submission of the wife to her husband but also defines the nature of this submission. This fact is very important because men and women have a sinful tendency to twist the imperatives of Scripture to allow either greater human autonomy than delineated or greater human control over others. Paul gives a number of specific instructions regarding the nature of biblical submission.

(1) Note that the apostle teaches that the submission of the wife is singular. “Wives submit to your own husbands” (Eph. 5:22). Wives are not commanded to submit to all men in general but specifically to their own husbands. There are churches in which this command to wives has been misunderstood as saying that all women are subject to all men in general. There are also oriental and Islamic cultures that teach that all women in general must be subordinated to all men. In some societies one can even observe women walking behind their husbands as if they are an inferior class. The Bible does not at all teach such subordination. Christian wives have a responsibility to submit to their own particular husbands.

There is a general submission required between all believers that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 5:21. This general submission is necessary for the peace, edification and proper functioning of the body. Note, however, that this general submission transcends gender boundaries. Both women and men are to place the needs of the others before themselves. The Bible also teaches that there are vocations that are forbidden to women. For example women are not permitted to teach or have authority over men in the church and women are not to serve in a fighting capacity in the armed forces. These facts do not mean or should not be taken as logical inferences that all women are in a state of subjection to all men. God’s law word recognizes the differences between men and women and honors women as the weaker vessel. Scripture also orders things so that women are not taken away from their responsibility as a helpmeet to their husbands and as “keepers at home” for the children.

The fact that the wife is required to submit to her own husband and not other men means that wives must first go to their own husbands for counsel and advice before they seek knowledge from others. The wife is to look up to her own husband as the theologian, counselor, Bible teacher and problem solver of the family. Paul writes, “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church” (1 Cor. 14:34-35). Even if there are other men in the congregation who are more knowledgeable in theology and counseling Paul says “go ask your own husband in private.” By asking the husband at home the wife shows her submission, gives her husband the opportunity to lead and honors him. To ask another man or woman without first

consulting with her own husband is dishonoring to her husband. She is implicitly saying I cannot trust my husband's leadership skills in this particular area. Therefore, I must seek leadership elsewhere. If a wife goes first to her husband and her husband says, "Elder Bob is an expert in this area;" or, "Let's go ask elder Bob who has already thoroughly studied this topic," then she has submitted to her own husband's leadership and honored him. A wife must be careful to speak and act in ways that honor her husband's position of authority. Further, by going to her husband first and relying on his judgment, the wife gives him the opportunity and impetus to grow and be the kind of leader she needs him to be. By going to others, the wife is limiting her husband's potential.

There are churches which violate this biblical principle by encouraging wives to first go directly to the pastor or elders before they have spoken to their own husbands. Churches must function in ways that encourage the biblical order of authority in the family. Wives must not be encouraged or allowed to set up counseling sessions with anyone without first asking for permission from their own husbands. (Obviously, if a husband is beating his wife, threatening to kill her, molesting the children or any other such thing, the wife should immediately consult with the elders of the church and if necessary the civil authorities). Also, wives should not attend church women's groups that permit women to complain about their husbands or seek direct counsel from such a group without first going to the husband. The husband must always be given the opportunity to solve family problems before others are brought in for advice. "A woman must cultivate a very high view of her head, both the position God has given him over her, as well as the authority God has given him. When women adopt this high view, submission is seen in an entirely different light. Submitting to someone whom God has placed over you with loving authority is a relief, not a burden."<sup>21</sup>

(2) The wife's submission to her husband is to be done as unto the Lord Jesus Christ. "[H]er obedience to her husband is to be regarded as part of her obedience to the Lord...It terminates on him, and therefore is religious, because determined by religious motives, and directed towards the object of the religious affections. This makes the burden light and the yoke easy; for every service which the believer renders to Christ is rendered with alacrity and joy."<sup>22</sup>

The wife must look upon her submission to her husband as an act of obedience to Christ and not merely to her husband. Why is this principle so important? A major reason is that in a number of cases wives are more educated, smarter, have better taste, are more decisive, etc. than their own husbands. A Christian wife in such a situation who may disagree with the decision of her husband will still gladly submit because she knows her actions are pleasing to Christ. The basis of a wife's submission is not because the husband is superior or because of some arbitrary social custom, but because it is a religious duty to her Savior and Lord. Although it may be difficult to submit to a thick-skulled sinful human, it is very easy to submit to the sinless Son of God. After a husband and wife communicate in a Christian manner about something and there is a disagreement, the wife must yield to her husband's decision in a cheerful respectful manner. Even if the wife is totally convinced that her idea was better she must submit with joy because she is obeying Christ and pleasing Him.

A wife who refuses to submit to her husband is rejecting the authority of Jesus Christ. A woman that continuously and obstinately rejects the authority of her own husband tramples under foot the holy Scriptures and Christ's lordship. By her behavior she is declaring to God: "I reject your created order, your law, your authority, Your Son. I'm going to call the shots around

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<sup>21</sup> Nancy Wilson, *The Fruit of Her Hands: Respect and the Christian Woman* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1997), 17.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856], 227-228).

here. I don't care what your word says." Such a woman is setting her seal of approval on the sin of Eve in the Garden of Eden. A woman who purposely continues upon such a path is giving concrete evidence that she is not truly regenerate.

Therefore, wives, if you want to gauge your obedience to Christ and your love toward Him, then examine your own behavior toward your husband. Are you submissive? Do you obey cheerfully and quickly? Do you obey in a respectful manner? Or: Do you ignore your husband's instructions? Do you obey only when you think it is important or a good idea? Do you obey with a disrespectful attitude, with grumbling comments, complaints, stalling and/or a rolling of the eyes? If this has been your behavior then you need to repent, confess your sins to God and reconcile with your husband.

Wives, keep in mind that your children are watching. They are being instructed by your example. Are they watching an Eve in her rebellion or a faithful Sarah? Are they learning the nature of true biblical submission by your actions and words; or, are they learning to disrespect proper God-instituted authority? When you observe the disobedience, rebellion and disrespect to your own authority by your children, are you watching a reflection of your own behavior to your husband? While it is true that a wife's submission to her own husband is rooted in creation and is God's revealed will for all marriage relationships and, therefore must be obeyed without reservation, the obedience of the wife to her own husband is for her (and her children's) benefit. It comes with great blessing and is imminently practical. An obedient Christian wife is an excellent example of proper submission and devotion to Christ. Children raised in such a home will be obedient and respectful to their parents. "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who causes shame is like rottenness in his bones" (Pr. 12:14).

If a wife is to submit to her husband as to the Lord then it is rather obvious that the biblical submission of the wife must be founded upon faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter mentions this necessity when he points women to the Old Testament examples of obedience. "For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands" (1 Pet. 3:5). Old Testament holy women lived out their faith in God by their godly behavior toward their husbands. When a woman believes in Christ and places her trust in Him her obedience to her husband is no longer founded upon social custom or the worthiness of her husband but upon her relationship to Christ. No matter how her husband acts, her commitment to obedience is not shaken because it flows from her devotion to Jesus. By focusing upon the Lord a wife's anxieties, doubts, troubles and fears dissipate because she knows that Christ is sovereign. He has "all power and authority" (Mt. 28:18). He rewards obedience (1 Cor. 3:14; 2 Jn. 8) and has the power to change a husband's heart (Phil. 2:13). Such a godly wife obeys Christ, prays and waits upon the Lord. A wife who trusts in Jesus does not try to force her husband to act in a certain way. Instead she places her faith in God's word, stops worrying and waits patiently for God to answer her prayers.

(3) The wife is to be subject to her husband in everything as the church is subject to Christ. There is no area of life and activity in which the wife can disregard her husband's decision. The wife does not have the option of submitting to some requests while ignoring others. Although a good husband will discuss important decisions with his wife because he highly regards her godly counsel, the final decision is always the husband's. The husband has the final say in where to live, what house to buy, what kind of car to drive, the education of the children, etc. Obviously this does not mean that in every little day to day decision that needs to be made (e.g., buying groceries, paying bills, disciplining bad behavior in the children) the wife must act like a child and ask permission from the husband. There are many areas in which the

husband delegates authority to his wife for the efficient functioning of the household. However, it does mean that the husband is ultimately responsible to oversee everything that takes place in the home.

The submission of the church to Christ is to be total and comprehensive. The submission of the wife to her husband is comprehensive only within the parameters of God's word. In other words, the wife is to obey her husband in everything except that which contradicts the word of God. This point is very important for certain teachers who have been using Ephesians 5:24 as a proof text for an absolute submission on the part of the wife—even if the husband asks his wife to sin! Such an interpretation ignores a very fundamental principle of biblical interpretation that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. The idea that a wife can sin with impunity under her husband's authority is a form of ethical relativism. One is reminded of the famous "don't blame me" sentence used repeatedly at the Nuremberg trials: "I was only following orders." When anyone asks a Christian to commit sin (even when they are in a position of authority over a believer) the only appropriate response is: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Ac. 5:29). Gordon Clark writes, "The previous verse states the basis of Christian subordination: It must be in fear of Christ. Neither a husband nor an emperor should have absolute authority. They are both bound by the law of God, and we, men, women, and citizens, must obey God rather than men."<sup>23</sup>

If a Christian is married to an unbeliever she must respectfully disobey her husband if he asks her to lie, steal, commit adultery, worship idols, go to an apostate church, etc. She must explain in a respectful, submissive, non-contentious manner her biblical reasons for disobedience. If the unbelieving husband is threatening, the wife should seek help from the elders in her church.

Although a husband does not have the authority to ask his wife to violate Scripture in any way, this principle does not give the wife the permission to start arbitrarily labeling things she does not like to do as sins. If a Christian wife is going to disobey her husband it must be over a real violation of God's law and not legalistic, subjective pietism. When a wife believes she must disobey her Christian husband she must be able to prove her point from the Bible alone. In such a situation it is advisable to get counsel from the church elders. If a husband and wife disagree over an issue that does not involve the wife in sin yet is not based on a sensible interpretation or application of Scripture (e.g., the husband requires the wife wear long dresses in the house [in other words he forbids pants or shorts even in private]) then the wife should defer to her husband even though she thinks his opinion is silly.

There are some women who have convinced themselves that a partial obedience to their own husbands is acceptable. They submit to their husband's authority in some areas yet stubbornly refuse to submit in others. They set up areas of autonomy over which no one, even their husbands are to tread. By continually refusing to obey in certain areas they hope that their husbands will give up and relinquish control. It is important that husbands in such situations remain strong and do not permit their wives to usurp their authority. A partial obedience is disobedience. Given the sinful inclination toward circumventing the imperatives of Scripture, the Holy Spirit emphasizes that submission is required in all areas.

It is also important that wives do not manipulate their husbands to get their own way. A wife who manipulates her husband by crying, nagging, complaining, making deals (e.g., I'll do this if you let me do that, etc.) begging or even intimidation (e.g., I will not be a happy wife if I do not get such and such) is obviously not fulfilling the spirit of this requirement. This author has

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<sup>23</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Ephesians* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1985), 183-184.

known professing Christian married couples in which wives were constantly manipulating their husbands into obeying their desires. Such women were totally convinced that they were submissive and obedient when in reality they were deceitful, disrespectful and domineering. When the apostle Peter discusses the submission of the wife he notes the importance and beauty “of a gentle and quiet spirit” (1 Pet. 3:4). A woman’s outward adornment and behavior should reflect a godly, submissive interior character. Obviously a woman who is self-willed, manipulative and plotting does not fulfill this requirement.

Given the comprehensive nature of the submission of the wife to her husband it is extremely important that women who are contemplating marriage only consider Christian men who they are prepared to submit to in a biblical manner. If the Christian man is immature, unintelligent, impulsive and, overall, a poor leader, then a woman in such a situation would be wise to wait and seek a mate elsewhere. Once the marriage vows are complete the wife must obey. Picking a life-long partner is one of the most important decisions a person can make. Therefore, it is imperative that decisions are made based on biblical principles and not emotion, infatuation or sexual attraction.

(4) The submission of the wife to her husband is to be done in a respectful manner. Wives are commanded to respect their husbands. “Let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Eph. 5:33).

The verb respect (Greek, *phobe*) means that the wife is to have a high regard for her husband. She is to have an attitude of reverence and honor toward him. George Knight III writes, “The respect asked of a wife recognizes the God-given character of the headship of the husband and thus treats him with dutiful regard and deference. Just as husbands have been asked to display their headship through likeness to Christ’s headship over His church, that is, through a love that cherishes and nourishes (verse 25, 28, 29), so now wives are asked to render their submission in a way that is most like that of the submission of the church to Christ, that is, a truly respectful submission because it is rendered voluntarily from the heart. A wife’s respecting her husband and his headship therefore involves not only what she does but also her attitude in doing.”<sup>24</sup>

A wife’s respect for her husband should be displayed in both what a wife does not do and what a wife does toward her husband. Respect involves many things that a wife must avoid in her speech and behavior. Wives should never submit to their husbands with anger, stubbornness, irritation, grouching, nagging, complaining, smart remarks and so on. Wives should not criticize their husbands by saying their decisions are stupid, wrong or unwise. A respectful attitude does not focus on a husband’s defects. When a husband does make a mistake a respectful wife will not rub it in with a “see I told you so.” Also, a wife should never make comments that are intended to hurt her spouse and tear him down. Telling a husband that he doesn’t make enough money, or that she shouldn’t have married him, that if she had been more patient she could have found a better spouse, is clearly off-limits.

Respect also involves a proper attitude and speech when the wife is away from home. This means that Christian wives do not criticize or put down their husbands in front of others: parents, friends, acquaintances, strangers or anyone. Even if a wife’s remarks are 100% true she must never tear down her husband’s reputation before others. She should speak to her own husband privately, humbly and respectfully about his problems. If his problems cannot be dealt

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<sup>24</sup> George W. Knight, “Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church,” in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 175.

with privately then biblical counseling is needed with his consent. (Obviously if sin is involved Matthew 18:15 ff. comes into play.) Women's groups and Bible studies that allow gossip and disrespect to spouses must be avoided. Women must respect their husbands even in their absence. They should not even make disparaging remarks about their spouses to their own children.

A wife who shows disrespect to her husband behind his back to others is simply feeding her own bitterness and disrespect instead of dealing with the alleged offense biblically. "Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool. In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Pr. 10:18-19). A Christian wife should focus on good positive things regarding her husband when talking to others. The husband who is respected can trust his wife with others. "The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Pr. 31:11-12). "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who causes shame is like rotteness in his bones" (Pr. 12:4).

Respect is not merely avoiding certain behaviors. It also has a positive side. A wife must show respect to her husband by complimenting and building him up. As a help-meet she is to encourage him in his God-given calling. Even when the husband does a good job mowing the lawn or building a shed, the wife should compliment his work. When a wife respects her husband biblically she helps him do more for the kingdom of God than if he was alone. There is an element of truth in the phrase that it is a woman who makes the man. A man who is married to a godly wife can often attain a greater level of sanctification and achievement.

When wives are told that they must respect their husbands they often raise the following questions. "Yes, that is what the Bible says, but, what if my husband does not deserve respect? What then should I do?" The Scriptures teach that the wife must still respect her husband. The respect of the wife is not contingent upon the respectability of the husband. How do we know that the wife's respect is not to be dependent upon the respectability of the husband? There are two reasons. First, the command to respect comes with no qualifications or expectations. Second, the Bible teaches that the respect of the wife toward her husband is the best method of rendering him respectable. If a woman is married to an unbeliever or a mediocre Christian she must find ways to respect her husband. Her submissive respectful attitude can be used of God to win over a stubborn husband.

When the apostle Peter addresses Christian women who are married to unbelievers he does not say to nag one's spouse into the kingdom but rather to win them to Christ by being submissive, chaste, godly and respectful like Sarah to Abraham. He writes, "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward-arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror (1 Pet. 3:1-6).

Peter does not sanction the idea that women should show disrespect to lousy or unbelieving husbands. On the contrary, he says that submission, respect and inner beauty is the best method for converting unsaved husbands. "A Christian must respect the uniform with which God clothed husbands, even if they poorly fit it. The respect is directed toward God and His

authority, not fundamentally toward the man in who it is invested.”<sup>25</sup> This principle clearly applies to women who are married to disobedient Christian husbands. When a woman’s life corresponds to her verbal witness, her words are far more effective. When a believing wife is married to a Christian who is sloppy in his walk, who is a poor leader, the best thing she can do for his sanctification is to be respectful, and submissive. Godliness on the part of the wife is used by God to convict and sanctify the husband.

Some Christian women have the idea that respect and submission should only be given as a reward for respectability and love on the part of the husband. There are woman who are in such situations who will outwardly obey a husband’s instructions yet do so with a respectful, bitter spirit. They believe that they must punish their husband’s bad behavior in order to see positive change. Such an attitude not only violates 1 Peter 3:1-6, but also the teaching of Paul that we are not to fight evil with more evil. The apostle says, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). Speaking of 1 Peter 3:1-6 Jay Adams writes, “Submission is not passive but active. She seeks to win her husband to Christ. The word win (vs. 1) is a military term. She is to declare war on her husband and attempt to take him captive for Christ. But the weapons she uses are to be obedience, respect, gentleness and quietness, and her basic strategy is to overcome his evil by doing good....Such submission is not doormatism. It is aggressive, violent submission bent on defeating evil by doing good! No Christian wife need sit still, having nothing to do about the situation; God has given battle orders. To sit in self-pity is sin!”<sup>26</sup>

Peter and Paul’s point about overcoming evil by doing good often raises certain questions by women who are married to unbelievers or believers who are poor leaders. For example: “How am I supposed to respect my husband when I don’t feel like it, when I don’t see anything respectable in his behavior? There are a number of things that should be noted in response to such inquiries. First, a Christian’s obedience to God’s word is never contingent upon the feelings or subjective state of the believer. When God issues a command He expects obedience whether we feel like it or not. If believers obeyed God’s word only when they felt like it, they would continually be guilty of all sorts of offenses. If we encounter situations in which we do not feel like obeying God’s word, we must still obey and pray that God would give us a heart that loves obedience, that has the proper feelings and emotions. Further, when Christians continually obey in a particular area that has been particularly difficult for them, they will (with the Holy Spirit’s enabling power) eventually develop patterns or habits of righteous behavior and the proper biblical feelings will follow.

Second, it is very important that wives understand that the motivation for obedience is not one’s feelings but a desire to please Jesus Christ. Luther writes, “It is a high, noble blessing a wife may have when she so conducts herself as to be subject to her husband, in that she is sure that her works please God. What can be a happier experience for her?”<sup>27</sup> The idea that feelings are the basis or motivation to obedience is egocentric and pagan. Our motivation must always be Christocentric. Martha Peace writes, “Few wives naturally have the right heart’s attitude to be submissive to their husbands. Even if a woman desires to please God by being submissive, she will not always feel like being submissive. Also in a conflict, when feelings are intense, it may be difficult for her to submit. Regardless of her feelings, she should honor Christ by developing a

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<sup>25</sup> Jay Adams, *Trust and Obey: A Practical Commentary on First Peter* (Greenville, SC: A Press, 1978), 96.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1982), 135.

mind-set or a resolve to do the right thing in the right way with the right motive whether she feels like it or not. In the process, her feelings will eventually improve.”<sup>28</sup>

Third, Christian wives must learn to be content in their situation in life. They must understand that God is sovereign and has placed them in a particular marriage. This point of course does not mean that wives should not work to improve their situation by biblical means. It means that wives should not complain and wallow in self-pity. “Therefore whoever wishes to be a Christian wife is to reason in this manner: I will not have regard as to what sort of husband I have, whether he be a heathen or a Jew, righteous or wicked; but I will have regard to the fact that God has placed me in the marriage state, and I will be subject and obedient to my husband. Then all her works are golden if she stands in such obedience.”<sup>29</sup> Wives who complain and disrespect their husbands are exhibiting a discontentment with God’s providence and care. Such an attitude and behavior must be banished because it is both selfish and sinful.

Fourth, wives should not focus on their husbands’ shortcomings but rather should look for ways to respect them. In other words, they should stop worrying about themselves and start obeying God’s word. When wives stop focusing on the negative aspects of their husbands’ behavior and start looking to the positive, they will find many areas in which they can show respect. Is your husband a good provider? If he is, then tell him how much you appreciate his hard work. Does he spend time playing with, helping and instructing the children? If he does, then thank him for his fatherly concern. Show him your appreciation. Nancy Wilson writes, “Most women can find many things to respect about their husbands; they merely need to be reminded of the many good qualities that they have been taking for granted.... Emphasize his work (or job) first, and then move on to other things.... God has designed your husband to need respect, and He commanded you to be the principal source of it.”<sup>30</sup> When wives build up their husbands biblically through giving them proper respect, they build up the whole household. They help their husbands become better leaders, more effective in dominion work and are used of God to make their husbands more respectable. It is usually the case that, the more obedient the wife is to this command (i.e. respecting her husband), the more her marital circumstances improve. As her circumstances improve, the easier it will be for her to obey this imperative.

Likewise, when a wife is disobedient to this command it often becomes harder to obey. What often happens is that a husband who does not receive respect will feel depressed or angry and will purposely avoid his wife. He will stay longer at the office or go off by himself engaging in hobbies or watching TV. This behavior in turn will lead the wife to have even less respect for her husband. This wife may nag him and treat him worse than before. Such a woman is literally tearing down her household by her disobedience. Ideally the Christian husband (who is both the leader and is ultimately responsible for what occurs in the home) would lead and communicate in such a situation. However, if he does not lead biblically or effectively, Peter says that wives are to turn things around by their respectful godly behavior. Wives are not to wait until their husbands get their act together. They are to take the initiative. They are to obey and build up their house. “Every wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her own hands” (Pr. 14:1).

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<sup>28</sup> Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 1995, 99), 175.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Luther, 135.

<sup>30</sup> Nancy Wilson, *The Fruit of Her Hands*, 36-37.

## Other Duties

Being a good Christian wife involves many duties and responsibilities. In this section we will consider some of the duties that are very important that have not already been considered. Due to the multifaceted nature of the marriage relationship and the need to keep this book relatively short, we will only scratch the surface. Wives would do well to consult other Reformed works on this subject.

(1) One of the main reasons that God created Eve was for Adam to have meaningful companionship. “And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him’” (Gen. 2:18). Adam could have had animals as companions such as a dog or cat. However, in such a case he would have still been alone in a sense because animals cannot engage in meaningful conversation. Eve was created as a helper suitable for the man. A wife is there not merely to keep house, raise children and satisfy her husband sexually. She also is to be her husband’s best friend and soul mate. It is very important that husbands and wives communicate about all areas of life on a daily basis. They both need to be there for each other, to encourage, comfort, give praise, laugh, cry and so on. It is wise for husbands and wives to set time aside for good conversation. It can occur over dinner, a pleasant walk or simply sitting around the family room after dinner. If a woman is married to a man who is not talkative or is distant, she must communicate her need of biblical companionship. Husbands and wives may not have the same hobbies or secular interests. They do, however, have children and the Lord Jesus Christ to talk about. Our precious Savior alone can generate interesting, edifying conversation for eternity. Be a companion to your spouse.

In a fallen world Christian husbands and wives are “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7). Their task of godly dominion now has a redemptive focus. This means that their companionship is to be directed toward mutual satisfaction. This involves family worship, praying for each other, theological discussion and mutual admonishment. Husbands and wives are in a unique position of knowing virtually every intimate detail about each other. Therefore, they not only can pray for each other according to knowledge, but they can lovingly point out each other’s sins and faults. When married couples have a close biblical relationship, they are not defensive regarding this type of communication but encourage it. If a husband has a behavior that is offensive to others that he is not aware of then he should be thankful to his wife for helping him improve his character. Mutual support in sanctification is an important aspect of companionship.

(2) The wife (if able) is to provide her husband with children. Wives should not succumb to the modern secular humanistic propaganda which says that children are a nuisance to be avoided; or, that the world is overpopulated and therefore, we all need to limit the size of our families. God commanded fruitfulness to Adam and Eve as an aspect of world-wide dominion. “Then God blessed them, God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply [Hebrew, *rabah*-“to increase exceedingly”]; fill the earth and subdue it’” (Gen. 1:28). This command is repeated after the fall to Noah and his sons. “So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth’” (Gen. 9:1). The Holy Spirit says specifically through the prophet Malachi that one of the purposes of marriage is to provide a godly offspring. “Yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring” (Mal. 2:14). Unlike our modern post-Christian culture, the Bible always view an abundance of covenant children as a great blessing. “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a

warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them" (Ps. 127:3-5).

If God commands believing husbands and wives to "greatly multiply" and says that He seeks a godly seed and teaches that an abundance of covenant children is a great blessing, why would professing Christians limit their family size to two or three children? Could it be that evangelical and Reformed churches have been influenced by our anti-family, anti-children culture? Could it be that many modern believers are more interested in material pursuits (e.g., fancy houses, shiny new cars, exotic vacations, new clothes, etc.) rather than filling up a quiver full of children for the purpose of godly dominion? When the heathen are limiting their families to one or two and are murdering millions of their own children in abortion chambers each year, Christians have a great opportunity to increase as unbelievers decrease. It is simply a matter of obedience to the clear teaching of Scripture.

Although procreation is an important purpose of marriage, it is not the central purpose. "Certainly the command to 'increase and multiply' is very important, but a marriage does not cease to exist if it be childless."<sup>31</sup> In God's providence some Christian married couples are unable to have children, while others struggle to have one or two. This must not be viewed as a curse of God but as God's particular will for that couple which must be accepted as ultimately for the good of both husband and wife. If a couple are without child they should pray for healing and consider adoption. Romanist theology which says the central role of marriage is child-bearing and which allows for annulment in the case of infertility, is clearly unbiblical. Adam and Eve were married and one flesh before they had any children. A woman who cannot bear children can still faithfully complete her task as a help-meet to the man. "God Himself defined Eve's basic function as a help-meet; important as motherhood is, it cannot take priority over God's own declaration."<sup>32</sup>

(3) A wife has a biblical obligation to be there for her husband sexually. "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Cor. 7:2-5). This verse teaches that one of the purposes of marriage is to protect both husband and wife from sexual immorality. This point was very important for believers in Greek and Roman society with their rampant sexual immoralities and perversions. In our own sex-obsessed culture it is equally important.

The Christian wife must take this responsibility seriously. Apart from the period of the menstrual cycle (Lev. 20:18; Ez. 18:5-6) and mutually agreed upon times of prayer and fasting (1 Cor. 7:15) the wife should never refuse her husband's advances. It is not enough, however, that the wife simply engages in the act in a cold mechanical way. She must give herself to her husband in a happy, warm, affectionate, joyful manner. This does not mean that the wife must climax every time. For many women this is a physical impossibility. Men and women are different physically. It does not mean that the husband should sense that this is something the wife wants to do. The husband should sense happiness and joy from his wife and not get the impression that she believes sex is a nuisance; that she should like to hurry up and get it over

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<sup>31</sup> R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 353.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

with. As an act of obedience to Christ, the wife must learn to set aside the cares, work and concerns of the day and focus her attention on giving her husband the joyful, meaningful, fantastic, sexual pleasure that should be a part of every biblical marriage. (The husband must also put his wife first in this area by picking times when the wife will not be distracted by the children. Further, he should do everything he can to satisfy his wife before he considers himself.) A wife who neglects this area and refuses to fulfill her responsibility is behaving in a manner that is leading her husband into temptation. This area requires diligence.

Anyone who has been married for any length of time and has had children will understand that fulfilling this responsibility is not always easy. There are hormonal changes associated with childbirth that can drastically reduce a woman's libido. Also, taking care of small children can be exhausting physically and mentally. Further, some women have a decreased sexual drive as they age and go through the change of menopause. All of these things can lead to wives who if they had their choice would have sex less frequently. What can be done about these common experiences by Christian wives? The wife should be open and honest about these things and ask her husband for help and understanding. Perhaps the husband could set aside time for his wife to take a nap during the day. If there are hormonal problems they should research the problem and consult a doctor. The husband and wife must examine the various problems and make the necessary changes together so that both will heartily fulfill their marital responsibilities. It is important that wives do not let the contingencies of life interfere with their biblical responsibilities to be there sexually for their husbands. "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4).

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