

*“This is a great mystery,  
but I speak concerning Christ and the Church”  
Ephesians 5:22-33*

The Biblical Model for Married Life

God made us, and has given each of us a purpose and a plan. Our purpose is to glorify Him — to live our lives in such a way that His nature shines forth in our lives, in our homes, in our churches, in our communities. But many do not acknowledge that He has also provided us a plan to accomplish this purpose, in the pages of the Bible, by modeling for us what it is to be a godly father or mother, husband or wife, son or daughter, sister or brother. It is only to the extent that our lives are aligned with His design for us, that we glorify God. In our text, we read that man and wife relate to each other as Christ relates to the Church. This morning’s message, and the ones to follow next week and the week after, are intended to help you see how God’s design for marriage applies to your life, and to encourage you to build — or rebuild — your marriage accordingly.

When people want to know how a man and woman are to relate, they typically refer to the experts, or at least the self-proclaimed experts they see on television or in the newspaper. The experts have theories, and knowledge, and experience, and will gladly tell you the way things work, according to their theories and studies.

That is the usual way of learning how to do something in our day. When I needed to build a chicken coop, I went to the computer and “Googled” “chicken coop plan.” Within seconds, I was looking at a really elegant little plan offered by the experts at the Virginia Cooperative Extension. The experts *used* to reside in University towns and would be heard from only occasionally, when they emerged to issue a new finding in their journals or, if it was really sensational, in the news. Now a few keystrokes will take you to a veritable banquet table of experts.

But as you look at your choices, it becomes evident that the experts often offer conflicting advice. What one expert says today is often refuted by another expert tomorrow. When I was young, the experts said that butter was bad for you — that you should eat a bizarre synthetic butter-like substance called margarine, instead. Two decades later, other experts made the news, saying “You must stop eating margarine! It will kill you! You should be eating real butter, instead.” At various times, experts have warned us that we should not eat chocolate, or drink milk or coffee. In the fifties, they even warned our parents (or grandparents), not to let our babies drink their mother’s milk! And still, many wait breathlessly to hear what the experts have to say next.

I am not an expert. I have done no sociological studies about male/female or adult/child relations. I am just a Christian man — a husband of a thoroughly delightful wife, a father of five fine boys and two lovely girls, if I may say so myself. If I were to develop a philosophy of family life based on my experience, it would fit my situation very well — but it may or may not be of any use to you. I know that each of you have a different story, a set of experiences unique to you that I know very little of. So, instead, I am going to present to you the ideal of married life by showing you the original, timeless model given

by God in the Holy Scriptures as an example for each Christian man and woman in every land and every age.

We are first going to look at the relationship between Christ and the church, studying it as a model for husband and wife relations. Next week, we will see how the Christian husband can put these principles into action in his relations with his wife. The week after, we will continue this line of thought, considering how the Christian wife can put these principles into action in her relations with her husband.

Even in the Church, there are many that would object that this ancient model of family relations is not binding on the modern marriage, given the massive changes in our culture. Some may object that I am presenting an outdated and prejudicial view of marriage when I speak of husbands and wives holding different offices, and discharging separate responsibilities. Lest I be misunderstood, I tell you emphatically that I believe in an absolute intrinsic equality of men and women before God. I am *not* saying that men are of greater value than women, or that God thinks more highly of the man than of his wife. Instances abound of wives being more intelligent or good-natured than their husbands. As we are told in I Cor 11 (11-12), *...neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.* Eve came from Adam's side, and each of us men came from our mother's womb. The Scriptures plainly show that God is pleased with those who obey Him, whether man or woman, and that His judgment will fall on any who rebel against Him, whether male or female.

But our culture is strangely skewed. We gladly accept that people perform different functions in society. Who is more important — the cook or the policeman? Both provide essential functions. But they have decidedly different roles, different offices. But when it comes to man and wife, society declares that there can be no difference between them in role or function. We know that God the Father and His Son are the same in substance, and are equal in power and glory, but the Scriptures tell us that they do differ in the offices they hold in relation to each other, and to all created beings.

Some may feel that applying this model to their marriage is asking too much — that it is beyond the reach of any man or woman — and therefore of little use to us practically. But Christ came to earth to make the heavenly life available to us now. When Christ, the blessed Son of God and Holy Husband of the church, came to dwell among us as a true man, and obeyed His Father and loved us, and died for us, we believe that He saved our souls from a future in hell. But He did something else for us. He also saved us from a living hell in the present — a hell of bondage to our fallen natures and from the dreadful conflict, and turmoil, and boredom of the fallen family. He showed us what He desires for His children — the strangely wonderful, thoroughly counter-cultural, vibrant life of the Christian family.

What is the purpose of the Christian family? To glorify God by our love for Him and for one another. How do we get there? By following in His footsteps — doing as He has done, and obeying His commands.

God's instruction for married life is found in many places in the Bible. Colossians chapter 3, 1 Corinthians chapter 11, 1 Timothy chapter 2, Titus chapter 2, and 1 Peter

chapter 3 all deal with aspects of relations between man and wife, but Ephesians 5:22-33 presents the model in its fullest expression. I will read it again.

*Ephesians 5:22-33. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.*

*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.*

*This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."*

Can we seriously compare the husband to Christ in the home, and the wife to the church? These comparisons seem extreme, or perhaps even offensive to us, because we do not really understand the relationship of Christ to His church, and because our families fall so short of what God has promised us. The cruelty of male chauvinism and the strident bitterness of feminism have worked to make man and wife enemies rather than "one flesh." Banishing the Biblical roles from the family has damaged both husband and wife, as the only God-designed means of producing happy and productive homes are ruled unacceptable for our time.

But let us consider carefully these God-designed means. This passage in Ephesians tells us that, as Christ is to the church, so a husband is to his wife. As the church is to be with Christ, so the wife is to be with her husband. Before we can know how a husband is to relate to his wife, we must first understand how Christ relates to the church. So we will first look at how Christ relates to the Church, and then we will see how the Church is to relate to Christ.

What is Christ to us? Christians have long viewed the work of Christ in relation to the church in terms of His three offices: that of the Prophet, the Priest, and the King. We see each of these offices in our text. In verses 23&24 we see Christ in His kingly office, as "the head of the church" and of "the church (*being*) subject unto Christ." In verse 26, we read of His priestly office in that "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that He might sanctify it and cleanse it." Verse 26 continues "with the washing of water by the word", thus revealing His prophetic office of the very Word of God.

**Let's take the last of these first, and see how Christ is the Church's Prophet.**

**A prophet is one who hears from God and speaks for God.** When I say "prophet", who do you think of? Elijah? Remember how Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal and called down fire from heaven upon their heads? That is what it looks like when a prophet

speaks God's words against His enemies. That is *not* what I will be suggesting as a model for how we husbands are to deal with our wives!

When I say "prophet", do you think of John the Baptist? Remember how John spoke to prepare God's people for the coming Messiah, saying "Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand! Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!" (Mt 3:2-3) John, and the many prophets who were before him, sought God that they might hear His word, and then spoke God's word to His people. These men were types of the true Prophet to come — the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 13:57, Christ speaks of Himself as a prophet, when He says "a prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house." He it is who speaks into our lives His inspired Words, for He is the very God that inspires us. He is the One who shows us the way of salvation, and tells us how we may please His Father. He confronts us in our sin and tells us to forsake our sinful ways and receive his forgiveness and mercy. He tells us plainly and lovingly, in the pages of the Bible, His will for our lives. Christ, in His prophetic office, speaks for God to man.

**A prophet also represents God before man.** He is the "image" of God to man. That is why the prophets of old were revered by those who feared God, and despised by those who feared man instead of God. How you treat the representative of God reveals whether you are a child of light or of darkness.

Christ was the ultimate image of God to man. In Hebrews 1:3 we read how Christ was "the brightness of His Father's glory — the express image of His person." Jesus said "He who hath seen me hath seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). The Pharisees, who appeared to be the holiest men in their communities, were shown to have hearts of darkness when they despised the very image of God in Christ. But when Christ's disciples saw the image of God in Christ, they rejoiced in Him and sought to follow His way. This is what the prophet does, he stands for God in all his words and deeds, showing forth the nature of God to man, so that man might see, and follow.

**A prophet leads God's people in His way.** Which prophet waited for a godly consensus before speaking God's word? Can you imagine Jeremiah checking the polls before deciding whether to tell the people to obey God rather than man? Did John the Baptist preach righteousness and repentance to the people because he thought they deserved God's mercy? Did Christ love the Church because we are pure and lovely? No! Christ loved us and died for us, while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:8). Did He die for us in response to our love for Him? No. "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). When the prophet leads, God's people follow.

In leading God's people, the prophet sets the spiritual atmosphere of the Church. Christ, the true Prophet of God, challenges us to grow in godliness and in beauty, but always with a merciful eye to our frail and fallen natures. Christ leads us by example, as well as instruction, setting for us a pattern of godliness, devotion to God, holiness, and compassion. When He walked among us, He did not hesitate to act, but was decisive and bold, inspiring confidence in His people.

Christ told His people what God would have them know, He showed them what kind of God they served, and He confidently led His people in the way they should go. **Christ is all these things to us. He is our Great Prophet.**

**Now let us look at Christ as the Church's Priest.** In the Old Testament, we encounter a number of priests, from bold Phinehas (Eleazar's son), to negligent Eli, to faithful Jehoida. In Hebrews 8:1, we read that we have a priest much greater than these. Christ is our Priest — “We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb 8:1), “a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb 7:17). What is a priest?

**A priest is one who stands as a representative of the people to God.** He is the one who takes responsibility for the sins of the people. The most powerful testament of the love of Christ for us is this very thing — that He took upon Himself the responsibility for our sin. Our text from the book of Ephesians tells us that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. How did Christ love the Church? The point of this verse is not that Christ was really, really fond of us. It is that Christ's love for us led Him to take the responsibility — to take the punishment — for things He had not done. He stood between the just wrath of God and the target of that wrath — a people that was as a garden choked with weeds and ready to die. As Adam stood for the whole race of man in leading man into sin in his fall, Christ stood for all His elect in His death, rescuing us from the death of our sin and leading us into righteousness. As Peter writes in his first letter, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18).

**A priest is also one who brings the people into harmony with God.** He does what is required to spiritually cleanse the people, so that they can stand in the presence of God. Christ did this by cleansing the Church “with the washing of water by the Word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:26-27) Christ is washing His people clean in His Word, and is making His Bride-to-be presentable before God. He is passionately involved in readying her for Himself, making her glorious and holy. He loves the Church, even with all her sin and doubt. Indeed, He honors the Church, tenderly caring for her and cherishing her in her frail state. But He cannot have a Bride who is impure. And the Church cannot purify herself — it would be like scrubbing your skin with dirty hands. No. Christ will not present to Himself a soiled wife. He will not bring a dirty Bride before His Father. So He has taken upon Himself our dirtiness, and He has washed us with His saving Word, making us holy and glorious in His eyes.

**A priest also keeps the people continually before God's eyes.** The service of the priest in the Old Covenant was a steady one — the people were ever to be before the eyes of the Lord. The Temple services were not to be performed only when the priests were feeling particularly holy, or the people had been particularly good, or bad. Christ certainly has not dealt so with the Church. In Hebrews chapter 7 we read “He ever liveth to make intercession” for us” (Heb 7:25). Our Lord Jesus never grows weary in seeking our good.

Christ has taken the responsibility for all our sin, and has taken our place on the judgment stand before God. He does not leave us to wallow in the mire of our sin, but washes us

with His word. He never tires of seeking our good, but constantly appeals to God on our behalf. **Christ is our High Priest.**

**Now let us look at Christ as the Church's King.**

**A king has his people in subjection under him.** If he is to be effective, he can neither be Mr Nice Guy or a cruel dictator. A king cannot be satisfied with just being liked — his position requires that he lead, and his people follow. In a prosperous kingdom, the people rejoice under his rule, and gladly obey.

In John 1, we hear Nathanael acknowledging Christ as “the Son of God...the King of Israel” (John 1:49). Jesus is Lord. But does Jesus “lord it over” the church? Does He treat the Church with bitterness and a fist of steel? No. He will not force His Bride into submission, He will subdue her through His merciful goodness. In Romans we read that the goodness of God leads us to repentance. What is repentance but a turning away from obeying the dictates of our sinful hearts and acknowledging His lordship over our lives? What Lord could be more worthy than He who “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant”? (Ph 2:7)

**A king also rules and defends his people.** A wise king rules with mercy and managerial skill. He understands the limitations of his people, and does not push them beyond what they are able. He gives them what sustenance they need, and delegates authority to ensure that all areas of responsibility receive their due attention. Christ always pressed His people onward, but did not frustrate them by requiring of them what they could not do, nor did He become frustrated with their weakness.

A king defends his people from want. He is responsible for their physical provision — that they are sheltered, fed, and clothed. A king also defends his people from attack, shoring up their defenses and readying them for battle. Christ, the true King, fed His people with fishes and loaves, and gave them strong spiritual armor for their coming conflicts. As we read in Ephesians chapter 6, this invincible armor of God includes truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God (Eph 6:13-16).

**And a king conquers the enemies of his people.** As the defender of his people, the king must be first in battle, executing his plan of attack on any who would do them harm. Christ is the King who, as we read in the letter to the Colossians, “having spoiled principalities and powers, ... made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col 2:15). Christ is our Lord and Defender and Champion. **He is our Triumphant King.**

We have now seen how Christ relates to the Church as Prophet, Priest, and King. The remaining question is... How is the Church — how are *we* — to relate to Christ?

The Church relates to Christ by responding to His leadership. Because the Church is to be the Bride of Christ, the way we respond to Christ's ministry to us is our statement to the world about what we feel about our Lord. When the Lord speaks His word to us in His prophetic office, we must listen and obey. Because the Lord, in His priestly office, takes responsibility for our failings and works to make us holy, we must make His goals our goals and rest content in His provision. The Lord reigns as King over us and protects us, so we must give Him honor and reverence with thankful hearts. Let's look at each of these areas a bit more specifically.

**Where Christ leads, we are to follow.** When He speaks to us as we read His Word, we are to carefully listen. When we are given Biblical preaching or teaching, we are to consider carefully and prayerfully, and study the scriptures, to see how we should respond to it. Many people go to church because that is what good, respectable people do. Or they go because the music and good will all around them makes them feel better. We are not to merely go through the spiritual motions, and go about our business until He taps us on the shoulder to get our attention — we must actively seek His voice, in the morning, throughout the day, and when we prepare for sleep at night.

And what we hear, we are to obey. Many love to hear, adding to their store of sweet morsels of wisdom, but few love to obey. And when we do obey Him, do we do it as a solitary act of submission, picking our preferred commands of God as if we were at Ryan's, and passing by the other bits that don't look so appetizing? But true submission is a union of nature, not individual choices — a renouncing of your autonomy in order to be wholly attuned to your Lord. We fear that submitting to Christ will remove our individuality and make us bland and uninteresting, but a wonderful result of submitting to Christ is discovering that you are becoming more and more unique — more and more the true “you” — the more control you give over to Him. It is our submission to sin that makes us uniformly unattractive.

It is difficult for us to submit to Christ. Our flesh cries out to remain in command. But Jesus was of the same substance as the Father, and equal to Him in power and glory, and yet He willingly submitted Himself to His Father's will in all things, as we read in Philippians chapter 2 (Phil 2:5-8). Christ reflected His Father's glory before men, and we are to reflect Christ's glory in our holy obedience. We are to be His glorious bride, reflecting His glory as we represent Him to those around us.

**Because the Lord takes responsibility for our failings and works to make us holy, we must make His goals our goals and rest content in His provision.** He made us for His pleasure — we did not make Him for ours. Therefore, we must learn what it is He wants done and set our hearts to do it. We are to see ourselves as His helpers. We see only what passes before our eyes — He sees all. If we work really hard, we learn more than we forget, and get a tiny bit more knowledgeable as we go — but He knows all. We dream, but cannot accomplish a fraction of what we desire — He can do whatever He pleases to do. Why do we think that our plans are to be preferred to His? Here is the question we should be asking — “If I was created to be a servant of the most high God, how should I be using my time?” We should take inventory of what He has given us and discover how we can put these gifts to use in His grand work. We are to take joy in our mission in life, and seek to become excellent in our service.

We can draw further instruction from the creation of the first family — Adam and Eve. Because the relationship between a man and his wife is modeled after the relationship of Christ and the Church, the creation of Eve tells us something about the Church. Eve was created to be a helper to Adam, a person to aid and complete him, not just a female version of himself. So the Church is to help Christ by joyously committing ourselves to further His work, and not our own.

We are also to be content with what He has given us. Sometimes we suffer need, so that He can meet that need through the grace He gives our brothers and sisters in Christ. In

some things, He has given us more than we need so that we have something to give to others. We are more precious to Him than the flower in the field in all its pristine glory. He knows what is best for us, and will take care of us. In Hebrews chapter 13, we are told to “be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” In all situations, we must be truly thankful.

**Lastly, the Lord reigns as King over us and protects us, so we must give Him honor and reverence.** We are not to be grumbling slaves, longing for our independence. We are to be fervent worshippers of our Lord and Savior. The worship we are to give entails honor and respect, and reverence and awe.

How are we to honor Christ? How do we show our respect for Him? We speak to our Lord, and tell Him how much we admire Him. We tell others of the greatness and goodness of our Lord. We behave ourselves with great care, lest we bring any dishonor upon Him. Instead of being concerned about what people think of us, we concern ourselves with what people think of Christ.

But we are to go beyond admiration. We are to have a holy fear and awe of our mighty, holy Lord. The God of all creation who gave His life for our sins is not One to be treated lightly, or casually, or as our equal. In our service before Him, we must never think of Him as less than “Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” (Is 9:6).

So we see the relationship between Christ and the Church. Christ is our Prophet, Priest, and King. We, in turn, obey His word, help Him in His holy work in the Earth, and honor Him. This is the office we have been made for. This is our calling as sons and daughters of the living God.

### *“As Christ also loved the Church”* The Christian Husband

It is common knowledge that the institution of marriage is under attack. When my parents married, the concern for marriage was the increasing levels of divorce. When I was a boy, communal living arrangements were being experimented with and promiscuity became more and more visible and accepted in society. Today we see serious deterioration of the laws of some states, moving toward redefining marriage to include a variety of God-forbidden relationships. We have all been taught what constitutes a Biblical marriage, and have heard what is expected of the Christian husband and the Christian wife. This series of sermons is intended to give us all another opportunity to clarify what may have become murky in our marriages, a time to reflect, reconsider, and to re-establish in our minds and hearts the call of God upon husbands and wives. It is also intended for you young men and women, that you may prepare yourself well for the demanding and rewarding years to come. You young men will be called upon to do much more than just bring home a paycheck.

What does God call us to be when we covenant in marriage? Our text likens a man and his wife to Christ and the Church. This analogy is not just one, superficial way of looking at marriage, like “marriage is like a dance” and its corollary “It takes two to tango.” The

relationship of Christ to the Church *defines* marriage. After reading what is required of the husband and wife, we are told “this is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.”

**Consider the depth of the likeness** here. In Genesis 2 we read of the first marriage. We see that when God calls a man to marry, He calls him to “leave his father and his mother, and ... cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” Did not Christ leave His Father in heaven to come and cleave unto His Bride, the Church? Has He not made us one with Him in solemn covenant? When God likens a man and his wife to Christ and the Church, He is instructing we husbands to be as Christ to our wives, and you wives to respond to your husbands as the Church is to respond to Christ. Indeed, whether we like it or not, we husbands *are* as Christ in our marriages. Each one of us stands as prophet, priest, and king to his wife. If I ignore or neglect my calling as a husband, I am telling my wife, and my children, and all who know us, that I see Christ as a blind or sleepy prophet, a callous priest, and a careless king. I ask you husbands — I ask myself — What sort of Jesus are we proclaiming by the way we treat our wives?

In the same way Jesus is the true Prophet of the Church, each Christian husband is a **prophet to his wife**, bringing the Word of God to bear in compassion, in direction, and in correction. Are you a false prophet, speaking worldly or selfish or misleading words? Are you a mute prophet, by your silence proclaiming that Christ has nothing to say to His Bride, the Church? The Christian husband is to search God’s word diligently for His guidance, seeking God’s special mission for his family, while prayerfully considering the needs of his wife. The husband is the one who must make clear to his wife where his family is headed, and how he plans to get there. In doing this, he must do something that may not come natural to him — he must... talk to his wife. Many — if not most — men are reluctant to take such an active role in their marriage. They feel much more comfortable just going to work and bringing home money to provide for their family. Such a man cannot imagine being a prophet to his wife — what would he have to say to her? A husband knows that he cannot call his wife to holiness while modeling rebellion and selfishness before her. He and his wife would both know his every pious word to be a sham. If he is to be a prophet to his wife, he must have the words she needs to hear, and he must endeavor to live these words before her! Acquiring these words is not automatic, something that comes natural to a man. A man must labor to get these words and live these words. He must study his Bible, and attend church to hear the Word of God. He must talk of the things of God with his pastor and friends. He must immerse himself in the words that change a man, and make him wise and holy. Once his head and heart are full of truth and in his mind he sees a vision of what life could and should be for his family, he is ready to begin washing her in the living water of God’s word.

You may say, like Moses, that you are not eloquent, but “slow of speech, and of a slow tongue” (Ex 4:10). But before he had died, Moses ended up writing a fifth of the Bible, and gave some tremendous speeches to the children of Israel. We men can do much more than we think, if we only submit to His calling. Indeed, “we can do *all* things, through Christ which strengtheneth us” (Ph 4:13). Your wife does not need eloquence, she just needs to know where her family is headed and what she needs to do to help out. She needs to know that your vision is not just your vision, not just a vision for the children, but a vision for the two of you. As the husband-prophet in your home, you are

responsible for setting the spiritual tenor of the family — which means you will lead the way in spiritual discussion, prayer, reading of the Scriptures, attendance in worship, and in ensuring that the household is run in accordance with the commands of God. John Bunyan once told men to be “such a believing husband to your believing wife that she may say, ‘God has not only given me a husband, but such a husband as preaches to me every day the way of Christ to His church.’”

The husband also **represents Christ to his wife**, as the covenantal head of the family. In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 7, we read that the man “is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man.” That is to say, that the husband reflects God’s glory in the family, and his wife reflects her husband’s glory. These are hard words to hear in our day, when so many men — through their negligence or cruelty — are such poor representatives of Christ. But our model is not the fallen men all around us, but our risen Lord, who loves His bride purely and selflessly.

Thirdly, as husband/prophet, **the husband is responsible for leading his wife**, and not just reacting to her frustration. Many men take a passive stance within their families, acting only when the tensions and lack of direction in the family lead to a crisis. Many men are intimidated by their wives, or are under the impression that a man cannot both lead his wife and be loving and supportive. That if he were to try to lead, she would rebel, accusing him of not loving her. But Christ is the undisputed leader of the Church, and the husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the Church. Letting your wife set her own course as best she can is not loving her. A godly husband leads his wife in a kind and understanding way, taking into account her strengths and weaknesses and desires. Her safety, her growth, her joy, her beauty must become all important to you. A husband must know that leadership is not having your own way, it is serving in such a way that those under your authority grow into their destiny in Christ. What is that destiny for your wife? That she be washed in the water of the Word. That you would wash her in the cleansing water, that she would not be hindered in life by persistent and lingering sins. That you would wash her in the nourishing waters, that she would flourish in all her God-given talents. That you would wash her in the soothing waters, that she might be protected and sheltered from anxiety and fear.

What if your wife rejects your loving attempts to lead her? Are you then free to let things go as they have always gone? Christ loved us while we yet sinners. He tenderly brought His disciples along, according to their maturity and ability. You must gently but steadily persist in your duties. You may not feel comfortable in your role as husband-prophet, but God has made you the head of your home, and you must fulfill your responsibility.

The husband-prophet must also be steadfast. God gives us a number of relationships that are temporary — your relationship with your parents will change when you leave their home. Your relationship with your children will change when they leave your home. Your relationship with friends and co-workers and brothers and sisters in Christ are all subject to change as folks move away. But the relationship of a husband and his wife is not to be broken except by death or the mortal blow of infidelity. There is no allowance in God’s design for a man and his wife to decide that they “no longer love each other: or find that they are no longer “compatible.” Has Christ abandoned His wayward and inconstant Bride? A casual glance at Church history is all that is needed to see the glaring “incompatibility” of the Church with her holy Bridegroom throughout the ages. When a

man and his wife are not living as one flesh, but almost as enemies in the home, the husband must shoulder his responsibility as husband-prophet, become a man of prayer and study, and begin to wash his wife gently in the loving flow of water that is God's word. God has provided in His word all the direction that you will need in dealing with the problems in your home. And He has placed men around you who will gladly help you, when you need counsel and encouragement.

Men, you must remember that you are the divinely-designated husband/prophet in your home. If you are not fulfilling your responsibilities in this area, you may be sure that your wife and your children suffer from your negligence.

**Another unfamiliar role** for the husband is that of the husband-priest. This is where the husband's love for his wife shows most strongly. Christ "loved the Church and gave Himself for it." He stood before His Father, **taking upon Himself all the sins of the Church.**

In the military, an officer is expected to **take responsibility** for the actions of those placed under his command. This is an understood part of his job. Christ took upon himself our sins because of His love for us. We husbands are responsible for not only our own actions, but those of our wives, as well. Are there difficulties between you and your wife? Sometimes a man, when confronted with his shortcomings as a husband, will respond by pointing to his wife's failures. Such a man does not understand that his wife's failures are part of his shortcomings. A man may also be tempted to let his wife's sin stand before God, mentally using her sin as a counter-balance to his own, justifying in his mind his own rebellion and failure as a husband. Her problems are your problems, because the spiritual health of your family is your responsibility. Did Christ leave the church to face her due judgment? Christ assumed the responsibility for things He didn't do, so that His Bride might escape the just punishment for her sin. Our heavenly Father "hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 5:21). A husband can rescue his wife from much trouble in this life by his obedience. This, of course, is accompanied by the husband's ceaseless efforts to instruct his wife in godliness, that she might grow ever more holy and blameless.

Do you remember that when Eve was formed from one of Adam's ribs, Adam called his wife "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh"? In a real and God-ordained way, your wife is not completely separate from you. You both, together, now make one flesh. You are to love your wife as your own body. Therefore, when she is weak, you are weak. When she is strong, you are strong. You know this is true. A man is fooling himself if he thinks he can lead a happy life without ensuring the happiness of his wife. We must learn to see our own comfort, pleasure, and success in our wife's growth in peace and holy joy. A husband should delight in honoring his wife — she is his glory (1 Cor 11: 7-8) and his weaker, cherished vessel — weaker in the context of her office — she is reliant upon His prophetic, priestly, and kingly ministry to her. She is in no way his inferior before God — they are both equal heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet 3:7). A wife feels honored and loved by her husband when he shows her tender courtesy. A husband can find any number of ways to bless his wife with acts of thoughtful service and attention. My patient wife is still waiting for the day when I will stop and notice what she is wearing. It's no excuse,

but I remind her I don't even stop and notice what I'm wearing. But a husband loves as Christ loved when he nourishes and cherishes and honors his wife.

What kind of love are we speaking of? Your love for your wife is to be a transforming love. Christ had a goal in mind in His loving of the Church. He wanted to "present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Don't you want your bride to be glorious? Our wives all get spots and wrinkles as they grow older. We men may well grow bald and plump. But even the oldest Christian wife is a spirit growing ever more youthful and pure in holiness. We husbands must do what is required to nourish our brides to that place of glory! We are to take our beautiful brides and nourish, protect, and cherish them to grow ever more lovely. We are to love them as ourselves, taking care to meet their needs, to give them every proper comfort. As Peter wrote in his first letter, we are to dwell with our wives according to knowledge (1 Pet 3:7). If we try to do our duties as husband-prophets, priests, and kings without careful consideration of our wives' God-given nature, we will quickly blunder into selfish demands and hurtful conflicts. A husband's sacrifice of himself in labor, attention, and devoted care for his wife is just the faintest shadow of Christ's love, but it is a true shadow, and God will bless it. This is the way that a husband lays down his life for his wife.

Sometimes loving our wives this way is a joy. She is receptive, I'm feeling generous, and all goes well. At other times, I'm feeling tired and a bit selfish, she is irritable, and the whole project looks like it is failing. Many marriages have crumbled because the husband does not understand that the love that God gives a man and his wife is not the feeling that hits you like a wave and then recedes. True love is steadfast. What comes and goes is infatuation, lust, and the ever-changing waves of our emotions.

Our idea of the family needs some serious adjustment. A mother's love is legendary. But who has the responsibility for the love in the home? Not the wife. She is commanded to honor and submit. The husband is commanded to be the one who loves in the family, as Christ loved the Church. Christ demonstrated His love for the Church in many ways, including being an amiable companion for the disciples, instructing them thoroughly and with understanding, and showing them a pattern of godliness, devotion to God, holiness, and compassion for them to follow. Many marriages break because the husband has refused to love his wife as he ought, and she has gone seeking love elsewhere. The husband's love for his wife should have a tint of godly jealousy — he will not have his wife searching anywhere else for the love that only he can give her.

Even worse is an unfaithful husband. Christ loves the Church continually, loving them unto the end (Jn 13:1). Does Christ love the church because He is "in love" with the church? Because He is in the grasp of romantic attraction? Is He liable to abandon the church when He no longer feels those same old thrilling feelings? He loves the church single-mindedly, with a constant and unquenchable devotion. That is the way a man must love his wife — single-mindedly, with a constant devotion. He does not allow himself to view other women in lust, because they are not his flesh. God has given him a wife of his own to enjoy and to take pleasure in. Her beauty belongs to him. The Scriptures say that the wife is the glory of the man. He must not glory in any other.

Marriage is not a permanent “roommate” arrangement with certain intimate privileges. It is a covenant between a man and a woman for them to no longer be whole, apart from each other. Henceforth, they will be one flesh. To leave is to break covenant. To stay physically, but depart emotionally, is to make a mockery of keeping covenant. You must learn to see her no longer as “that woman that you gave me.” She is your very self. When you are temporarily out of harmony with each other there should be a pain in your side from the missing rib. When you are in harmony with each other, even when temporarily apart, you are whole and well.

When dealing with problems in your marriage, it is best to begin on your knees. Confess your own sins first, then take responsibility for the sins of your wife. Study the Scriptures to find God’s way of doing things. Then talk with your wife and come to an understanding with her about how to proceed in accordance with the Scriptures to bring healing to your marriage. This can only work in the context of ongoing communication between man and wife. Perhaps the most effective way of showing priestly love to your wife is to talk with her regularly and often. Tell her how much you appreciate and love her. Let her know your thoughts on how the marriage is growing and ask for her counsel on solving current problems. Let her know that you are taking responsibility for the way things are, and lay out your plan for the new way things will be done, in hopeful anticipation of God’s blessing.

So the husband-priest takes responsibility for the health of his marriage. He also works to **bring his wife into harmony with God**. Christ took responsibility for the sinful and deadly pallor of the Church, and then He offered up Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God. The husband-priest takes it upon himself to do whatever he can to bring his wife into a peaceful relationship with God.

Are there areas where your wife is “at odds” with God? Does she struggle with bitterness or ungratefulness? Is she overly anxious? Does she have a deep-seated anger? As her husband, any spiritual difficulty she has is an ailment in your bones and flesh. Take her problems as your own, and seek God’s help in restoring the health of your body.

**The husband-priest stands before God in prayer for his wife.** As Christ is at the right hand of the Father, making continual intercession for us (Heb 7:24-25), so the husband is to come to God every day in prayer for his wife. This can be done in your personal devotions and throughout the day, as God brings her to your remembrance. But remember that it is important that your wife know that you are praying for her. A good practice is to pray with and for your wife every night as you go to bed. For many couples, that is the best time to find out how her day has gone, and to lift her up in prayer before the Lord.

**The husband must also be as a king to his wife.** This is perhaps the hardest one for a modern-day wife to accept. You may recall that Sarah called her husband Abraham “Lord”, but in our modern-day, democratically-inclined minds, we expect anyone taking upon himself the role of King to be either a puffed-up, egotistical dictator or perhaps a druidic embarrassment. In order to recapture a biblical notion of the King, we have to drop our modern prejudices and discover God’s definition of a King.

Christ demonstrated for us what a King really should be. A godly king is one who takes responsibility for the well-being and happiness of his subjects. He claims the full and

total allegiance and obedience of his subjects. He rules and defends them, and restrains and conquers all enemies. He both gives and receives honor.

The scriptures tell us that Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim 6:15). As Christ is our model for the Christian husband, how can the husband be “kingly” without being a tyrant? Jesus treated His subjects with great kindness and mercy — He was no tyrant. He rode on an ass, not a gilded chariot. His authority in the family now resides primarily in the husband. Remember that we are told “the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (I Cor 11:3). When the husband fails, his family fails and suffers with him.

Just before our study passage in Ephesians we read the following words from chapter 4, verses 1-3... “I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” This is the key to being a winsome and effective leader — humility. Don’t even try to begin to exercise your authority in the home without a spirit of lowliness and meekness.

But the position *is* one that demands obedience. Now a king is not a king if his subjects do not obey him. Many husbands are far from kingly in their relations with their wives, and their wives are understandably mounting a rebellion against the family throne. The answer is not to abandon the Biblical model for marriage, but to instruct the husbands about their kingly responsibilities. He is to be a just man, so that his direction to his wife is wise and good. He is to be a merciful man, so that she never feels the pain of servitude. He is to be a humble man, modeling for his wife the truth that he who would be great in God’s kingdom must first be the servant of all. Remember that our Lord “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant” (Ph 2:7).

Both husband and wife are sinful creatures, so the husband will not be a consistently good king, and the wife cannot be expected to be a consistently submissive subject. A husband is warned not to become bitter about his wife (Col 3:19). If she refuses to submit to you, then you must not assume that the problem is wholly hers. By reason of your headship in the family, the problem is yours. Are you really treating her as Christ treats the church, or have you set up your own little rebel kingdom? The husband is not to force his wife into submission, for Christ never compelled submission from the Church. He has always honored us as “weaker vessels.” Nowhere in Scripture is the husband commanded to force his wife into submission. The wife is commanded to *make herself* submissive.

As a king, the husband is **responsible for ruling and defending his wife**. By ruling, I am speaking of management. He must wield his authority in the home with wisdom and restraint, ensuring that the family is working together productively and happily. He must keep in mind that his authority is his only by delegation from his Lord Jesus. He is husband-king solely due to his position as the representative of Christ in the home, not by any intrinsic value of his own.

The results of bad or lazy management are catastrophic. If the husband neglects this duty, assuming that everything is going to work out fine in the end, he is courting disaster. Proverbs 24:34 tells us that poverty will strike this man’s family as an armed man. Is he diligent, but his wife is negligent? He is still responsible for his wife’s actions — her negligence is his. He must learn to have confidence in his wife, and to delegate

appropriately to her, so that the family plan can still be performed in his absence. She is to be his help. Is she really a help if she must be told exactly how and when to do everything? It would be easier to do it yourself!

The husband is also **responsible for defending his wife**. He is to defend her from want, by working diligently to provide for her needs. He is to defend her from wandering, by loving her passionately. He is to defend her from outside attack, both physical and spiritual. He must provide for her physical safety, not allowing her to get in positions of physical danger. He must provide for her spiritual safety, by equipping her mind with truth and shielding her from hostile and alien philosophies. He must defend her at all times by a continual appeal to God on her behalf.

Finally, the husband-king is to conquer her enemies. Where is she vulnerable? Is it gossip conversation? Ungodly reading or entertainment? Giving in to discouragement? All these are evidences of sinful influences at work. In all cases, prayer should be your first recourse in combating the forces of evil. In some cases, physical action can be taken, to remove the enemy from the vicinity. As battles are won, other battles will soon appear, but every victory raises the family to a higher level of usefulness in the kingdom. Be assured that our Lord will reign as King over all “until he put all enemies under his feet” (1 Cor 15:25).

In summary, God has called Christian husbands to be prophets, priests, and kings in their homes. We husbands are to speak God’s word to our wives, take responsibility for her sins, rule her wisely, and defend her vigilantly. These responsibilities may be neglected or abused, but they cannot be avoided. If you refuse to be what you are called to be for your wife, your marriage will suffer — your family will suffer, and God will hold you accountable. But be encouraged. What God calls you to, God equips you to do. If you purpose to begin to do these things, God will bless your efforts. Be strong in the Lord, and in His might. Be vigilant and constant in your service to your wife. Love her passionately and savingly, as Christ has loved the Church.

## *“As the Church is Subject to Christ”*

### The Christian Wife

Two Sundays ago we began this series by identifying the biblical model for marriage — that is, Christ and the Church. We then saw that, in this covenantal relationship, Christ is our prophet, priest, and king, and we, in turn, are to obey, help, and honor Him. In last week’s sermon we attempted to identify the calling of every Christian husband in the light of this analogy. We discussed how a husband is responsible for speaking the truth of God’s Word to his wife, how he is to be the primary giver of love in the family, how he must both rule and defend his wife.

Today we consider the calling of every Christian wife, in the light of the Church’s obedient, accepting, and honoring response to our Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, the Church has no meaning. We are defined by Him. Apart from Him, our *lives* are without meaning. The church exists as a result of a covenant that God has made with us — a solemn bond, sovereignly administered by Christ, with all the blessings that flow from our obedience, and all the curses that follow hard upon the heels of our rebellion.

The marriage of a man and a woman is also a covenantal union, modeled after the covenant between Christ and His Bride, the Church. As the Church takes her identity from her relation to Christ (we are known as “Christians”), so the woman symbolically takes the name of her husband as a token of her identification with him. We see this taking of a single name for the two in the first marriage, between Adam and Eve, as well. In Genesis 5:2 we read... “Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.” This union is likewise intended to be indissoluble, unless there occurs death or treachery.

This joining of names is a symbol for a mystery of marital union that is presented repeatedly in the Scriptures. In Genesis 2:21 and 22, we see Eve being made from a rib taken from Adam’s chest. We are then told that the two created beings, Adam and Eve, will be considered from then on, in some sense, as one body. Jesus repeats this truth in Matthew 19:4-6, adding... “what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Now we know that every single body has only one head. In the letter to the Colossians we are told that Christ is “the head of the body, the Church” (Col 1:18). In Ephesians chapter 4, verses 15 and 16, we read that we are the body of Christ, and He is our head. Who then is to be considered the head of a married couple? We are told in 1 Corinthians 11:3 that “the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man.” The verse continues... “and the head of Christ is God.” If the man is not the head of the woman, then God is not the head of Christ, and Christ is not the head of every man. This appointed headship of the man is identical in principle to the relation of Christ to the Church.

This appointed position of the man is not to be a matter of pride or arrogance. It has nothing to do with a man’s intrinsic merit or value, but is a matter of role and function. What would the Church be like without the faith of its women? The woman is undoubtedly his superior in many respects, as he is hers in others. But what is a body without a head? There must be a head, and God has declared that the man, who was created first, is the bearer of that honor. Some say that this appointment of the man as the head of the woman is just a cultural relic from Paul’s day, and has no continuing validity in the Church of today. But this both denies the inerrancy of the Scriptures and ignores the source of this distinctive role, which is the creation order (1 Tim 2:13). Lest a man be tempted to pride in his position of honor, he is told in 1 Cor 11:11 that the man would be nothing without the woman, for every man is born of a woman.

So man is appointed by God to a position of honor in the family, as Christ is in the Church. The wife is to relate to her husband as the Church is to relate to Christ. Now we come to the duties of a wife.

The first duty of the Christian wife is to **follow the lead of her husband, submitting** herself to his direction. This is no token submission, or pretended obedience. Sometimes a woman of intellect and determination will strongly profess her husband’s leadership, and the duty of a wife to submit — while (perhaps unintentionally) manipulating and intimidating him behind the scenes. She may justify this to herself by thinking “if I don’t do it, nothing will get done.” A negligent husband puts his wife into a position of temptation — temptation to take charge of the family in his absence. But abdication by a

husband does not justify usurpation of his responsibilities by his wife. What motivation does a negligent man have to take up his responsibilities if he knows his wife will handle them for him? A wife in this position must have faith in God that He will deal with her husband as she submits herself to her husband's direction, and makes it clear to him that if leading is to be done, he must be the one to do it. She must have patience, as men often are stubborn, and take time to recognize and respond to God's call upon them. The men of the church are also responsible to challenge one another to shoulder their given responsibilities.

A man is called to leave his father and mother, and cleave unto his wife. Shame upon the man who leaves one Mom just to marry another to take care of him in the manner to which he is accustomed. Shame upon the woman who will accept the role of mother to her husband.

Sometimes a wife will speak ill of her husband to justify her usurpation of his authority in the home. If she does this, she must know that she is tearing down and destroying her own body. Ephesians 5:24 makes this clear — “as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.” Is Christ in subjection to God? He is equal to His Father in power and glory, but He does not boast that equality. He gladly and readily submits His will to that of His Father, taking upon Himself the form of a servant (Phil 2:7). Does Christ lose glory from His willing submission to God? Neither does the wife lose glory from being in subjection to her husband.

Recall that a man tells the world what he thinks of Christ by the way he leads his wife. It is also true that a wife tells the world what she believes about how the church is to serve Christ by the way she relates to her husband. As one wise lady in the church told me the other day, she has long known that she is to submit both to Christ and to her husband, but she has learned over the years that she will never submit to Christ any more than she submits to her husband.

If a wife is submissive and a cheerful help to her husband, she speaks truth about the Church. If she demands equal power in the governing of the family and gives him no honor, her life is a lie about the nature of the Church and she is rejecting the Lordship of Christ. She is saying by her actions that the Church is Christ's rival, not His bride.

Biblical submission is not a forced subjugation. It is a freely given resignation of one's will to another who is not another, but is her own flesh. It is a symbolic returning of the rib to its ancestral home in her husband's side. It is not a series of individual capitulations or deaths of the will, but a union of two natures into one. The wife's submission to her husband extends beyond him to her Lord Jesus. Her husband is the representative of Christ in her home. Refusal to submit to her husband's rightful direction is therefore an act of rebellion against God.

The wife responds to her Christian husband's ministry as a prophet in the home by becoming his student. If she is more intelligent than her husband, she is still to listen to his words and take them to heart, because he is charged with washing her with the water of the Word. How can he wash her in the Word if she will never tolerate being washed? How will she ever be washed, if she will not allow God's appointed washer to do his job? The plain words of a simple, godly man are worth far more than the fancy speeches of the ungodly intellectual. For her sake, and to encourage her husband in his calling, she must

go to him for spiritual guidance and let him know that she relies upon him for this (1 Cor 14:35).

She can also greatly aid and encourage her husband in taking on his responsibilities by cheerfully supporting and participating in family devotions, prayer with her husband, or any other prophetic ministry that he undertakes in the home. It is very difficult for a husband to do his duty by her if she is resisting his every effort. It is in her power to make her husband's duty a joy. She can set out his Bible as the appointed time approaches. She can make sure that, if there are children in the home, they are prepared to listen to their father. She certainly should be praying for her husband, that he would continually grow in his knowledge of the Word and in his application of the Scriptures to his family. God will bless every effort she makes in supporting her husband in his ministry to her.

Last Sunday, my family spent a delightful afternoon at Doug and Meril Stanton's house with the Tylees and the Richards. Mike Richards mentioned that he and his son David enjoy a vigorous scuffle that continues until one of the two either passes out or taps out in defeat (Mike admitted that he has ended matches both ways.) This harmless pastime is called "submission wrestling." My wife said that women have a similar pastime, but not as fun — wrestling with submission.

Many godly wives wrestle with submission. To be truly submissive is to be submissive through and through, with no reservations. That is the only way obedience can be a joy. It is the same way in the Church. There are some who go to great lengths to do all sorts of religious observances, but they have no joy in them. On the outside, they are being obedient, but on the inside, they are struggling to maintain a few mean strongholds of autonomy — areas outside of God's control. Life here is too short to waste it on joyless, mechanical observances. If you submit in your heart to the Lord Jesus, He will help you submit to your husband with joy.

There will come many times when you do not agree with the direction your husband is headed. Perhaps you will be certain that his direction is not from God, or perhaps you will suspect that it may be from God, or may not be, but you just don't want to do it. If you are convinced that his direction is wrong, you should respectfully approach him with an appeal. Tell him your reservations about his direction, and explain to him your reasons for disagreeing. Then leave the final decision with him, and humbly submit to his direction. He should seriously listen to and consider your counsel before making his final decision. If, on the other hand, you just don't want to do it, but don't have a rational argument against it, just humble yourself and submit to his decision. Honoring your husband and keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace will be of far more value to you than winning an argument with your husband.

**The second duty of the Christian wife is to help her husband.** That doesn't sound like much, but if you look back in Genesis, you will see that God made Eve because Adam was alone and had no one to assist him and keep him company. In a Christian marriage, the wife is the Eve that God has made to assist her Adam and keep him company. Adam was made and was alone. He had a need for a helper. God made a helper named Eve. Eve had a need to help. They were a perfect match. Christian wife — you have a God-given need to be a helper to your husband. When you help your husband, you meet your own designed need to help.

What kind of help does your husband need? Here's a question for you to ask yourself. "If I am put here as my husband's helper, how should I be using my time?" You know him better than anyone else. Think about what would bless him. Ask him how you can help him. Improve your helping skills in the wise use of the family resources, giving wise counsel, cooking, washing, and mending, nurturing the children, and whatever other specific ways he needs assistance. Make it your goal to become excellent in your service to God by being an excellent help to your husband. Do you love your husband enough to live for him? It is an excellent goal and worthy of all honor for a wife to pour her life into being her husband's helper.

God saw Adam and said "It is not good that the man should be alone." You are to be your husband's companion. A man needs a companion to cheer him and encourage him along the way. He needs a companion that he can serve and protect. He needs someone to share the experiences of life with, for an experience taken alone is only half the experience it would be if shared with a loved one.

The most important way that a wife can help her husband is to embrace his vision. Taking his vision as her own, she is no longer restricted to following directions. It is now her vision, and she can use all her God-given creativity in pursuing it. She will become a fountain of ideas to forward her husband's (and her) vision.

Is there no room at all for activities not related to your husband's vision? There is. The wife may well have interests and talents and opportunities that do not appear to forward her husband's goals. Oftentimes, an apparently unrelated pursuit or ministry does actually fit into the picture. For instance, a hobby may help the wife be more creative in her approach to her primary goals. A meeting of friends may encourage her and give her an opportunity to serve others outside the family. *Some* activities *may* hinder the wife in the pursuit of her goals by taking too much time, or consuming her interests, so that she neglects her husband. The couple must use wisdom in determining whether the planned activity helps or hurts the family. A husband's vision for his family must be broad enough to encompass activities that primarily bless his wife, and not just himself.

If her husband seems to have no vision, she must pray that God will give him one, and lovingly encourage him to take up his responsibility. She should encourage his participation in relationships that will aid him in becoming visionary. It is amazing what a godly and emboldening influence a thoughtful wife can have on a distracted or weary or timid husband.

A wife who takes her responsibility to submit to her husband seriously will be a constant blessing to him. She anticipates his needs, and lets him know that she loves him. This selfless service provides an environment of love in the home, which makes it difficult for any irritations or misunderstandings to flare up into fiery conflicts. She has a tremendous influence on the atmosphere of the home — if you want to predict whether the air in the home will be sweet or sour, you can quickly tell by looking at the wife. Of course, her spirit is greatly influenced by the ministry of her husband to her, and — as was mentioned last week — the final responsibility for the sweetness of the home environment resides in the husband.

Here are twelve specific ways that the wife can bless her husband, being a good help to him, adapted from Wayne Mack's book entitled "Strengthening Your Marriage"...

1) *Make your home a place of encouragement, comfort, understanding, and refuge* (Prov 31:11,20). It should never be a hostile environment for either the husband or the wife. The wife knows her husband better than anyone. She is perfectly suited to detect his discouragement and speak words that build him up. If he is going through a difficult time, she can sooth him and let him know that he is not alone. She can make her home a place of refuge for him, for the world can be hostile place.

2) *Be trustworthy and dependable* (Prov 31:11-12). It gives a man courage to know that his wife is trustworthy. He will never boldly forge ahead and conquer new territory if he is always wondering what's going on behind his back. She may not be in open defiance, but if her actions are hindering or not supporting the goals of the family, then they are a problem. The married couple must live and act as one. Two laboring faithfully together as one can get much more done than two heading off in different directions.

3) *Maintain a good attitude* (Prov 31:26, 28, 29; James 3:13-18; Phil 4:4). A wife who is kind, cheerful, peaceful and content is a great blessing to her husband, and helps him by her delightful countenance. A wife who is a scold or a complainer is as a continual dripping. You want to be a blessing.

4) *Discuss things lovingly, openly, and honestly with him* (Eph 4:25-26). It is no help to a man to conceal the truth from him. There are things that he cannot see without your help. Even if the truth is painful, he needs to know. When strife occurs between husband and wife, each should seek to remove the offense quickly. Don't let your differences stand between you. Never let the sun go down on your wrath. In almost every conflict, there is fault on both sides. The husband and wife should each approach the other and confess their fault, specifically identifying how they offended the other, and asking their forgiveness. A few moments of sweet humility will wipe away hours of painful distance between a couple, and reap the benefit of renewed companionship. *Offer suggestions, advice, and corrections when needed in a loving fashion.* A good wife "opens her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness." Unlike Christ, your husband is not all-wise, so you must help him with wise counsel. He is not all-knowing, so you must, at times, respectfully disagree and petition him to change his position. He is not sinless, so you must, at times, rebuke or admonish him for his sins. (Mt 18).

5) *Be content with your position, your possessions, and your tasks* (Phil 4:6-13; Heb 13:5,16). In Philippians chapter 4, we read that we are to be "careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." It is of our sinful nature to always want more things, or a better situation, than we currently have. But even the most content wife has real needs, and you are to take these needs to him in prayer, believing that He will provide what you lack. Worry has no place in the Christian home.

6) *Be longsuffering, forgiving, and forbearing* (Eph 4:2,31-32; Col 3:12-14). In love let the common irritations of life pass by you — do not give them a rallying place in your heart. Never hold a grievance against your husband. It will rob you of peace and harm your relationship with your husband. Take your grievance to him and seek to restore the peace. Be quick to forgive him and do not let yourself store up hurts to use against him in the future.

7) *Show an interest in his problems and concerns* (Phil 2:3-4). It is so tempting to be consumed by your own situation, but God tells us we are to “esteem others better than ourselves.” You are not to look only at your own things, but also on the things of your husband. It can be a great help to your husband just for him to know that you care about what is bothering him, and want to make his life pleasant.

8) *Be an industrious, diligent, frugal, ambitious, and creative member of the team* (Ps 128:3; Prov 31:10-31). Be a fruitful vine for your husband, bearing the good fruit of time well spent. Eve was created to do a job — to be a helper for her husband. You will find true fulfillment in doing that job with all the ability and strength that God has given you.

9) *Keep yourself beautiful, especially in the inner person* (1 Pet 3:1-7). A husband has a natural gift to appreciate feminine beauty. When you take care of your body, you bless your husband in that way. But what kind of beauty catches God’s eye? In 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 4, we read that more valuable than physical beauty is beauty in “the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.” A good spiritual life is a life of holy joy tempered by a deep reverence for God, a life known for reverential glee. When you beautify your spirit through cultivating a meek and quiet spirit, you do him great good, and God looks on with pleasure, as well.

10) *Cooperate with him in raising children* (Eph 6:2; Prov 31:26-28; 1 Tim 5:13-14). Your work in helping raise the children is crucial to your husband’s goal of taking dominion over his world, by having his children grow up to be godly men and women. In the beginning, God gave Adam and Eve a task that neither could do alone. He “blessed them, and said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over” all of creation (Gen 1:28). The wife’s efforts are key in accomplishing this vital work. In order to do this, you must *build loyalty to him in the children*. Children quickly pick up on strife between their parents. The wife must be careful not to speak ill of their father, showing disrespect or a lack of confidence in him. The children need to feel secure in the protection of their father, and their mother’s thoughtless words can harm them. She must not complain about what he has, or has not, done. She must show them that she is on their father’s side, and take up any differences with him out of the sight and hearing of their children.

11) *Be grateful to him* (Rom 13:7). Be content in what God has provided you through the labors of your husband, and show your gratefulness by simple thanks or kind deeds. This will encourage him to be the husband he should be. As a wife is a blessing to her husband, so a husband is a blessing to his wife. Recognize that your husband, with all his flaws, is a blessing from God to you, and show your husband how grateful you are that God has given you to such a man. Nothing gives a man heart like the praise of a grateful and godly wife.

12) *Show confidence in his decisions* (1 Cor 13:4-8). If you show that you do not have confidence in his decisions or disdain or forcefully resist them, you will make him more indecisive, defensive, and reactionary. It is to your benefit that your husband feel strong and confident, and you are the one who can most easily take that confidence away from him. If you feel that the decision is unwise, respectfully discuss your position with him. Assume that he is trying to do what is best for his family.

In all these actions, seek to further your husband's vision for his family. Join in and quietly strengthen him where he is weak. This will encourage him to grow ever more strong and decisive, and the two of you will be blessed.

The wife finds it easy to love her husband. The "love of a woman for a man" as the world's supreme love is a cliché and a lie. The supreme love in the world is that of Christ for His bride. Behind that, and patterned strictly from it, comes the love of a man for his wife. But there is truth behind the cliché. Women are famously good at loving.

One of the wonders of the world, for men, is how an apparently intelligent woman will fall in love with a scoundrel of a man. The woman will even acknowledge that he is a scoundrel, all the while professing her undying love for him. This is because the woman considers love and respect as two wholly different and even unrelated things. The Christian woman, however, is not allowed to do this. She cannot be content to love a man she does not respect. God calls her to respect her husband. She cannot trumpet his failings and sins to her friends, and then rush home to fix his supper and wait on him. She may see no contradiction in this, as she feels that, though she loves him dearly, he has not earned her respect. If he has not earned her respect, she is still bound by the God who made her to respect the man that God has given her. She should not allow herself to dwell upon, and certainly not to share with others, his failings. And she should tell her husband, directly, that she honors him.

That is what the woman finds difficult. She would much rather love, without being required to respect, her man. But God turns us all upside down and inside out over and over again in order to cleanse us and make us a fit bride. So He calls the wife to be known, not for her love of her man, but for the way she respects her man and lets him know it.

As the command of God to the husband is to love his wife, and this tells us that the wife has a need for her husband's love, so, when we read that the wife is to honor her husband, we understand that God has given the husband a need for his wife's respect. In conclusion, let us look at two key elements of this respect.

One element is admiration. The wife should cultivate an admiration for her husband's godly traits. Because men are made in the image of God, all Christian husbands have truly admirable traits. Perhaps some things come readily to mind for you. Is he diligent in his work? Is he loving and kind? Is he humble? Is he strong? Perhaps you are not used to thinking this way, and nothing comes to mind. You need to ask God to show you your husband's admirable traits. God requires us to tender to each other far more than is deserved. Remember, He loved you when you were yet a sinner with a heart as dark as coal. Do not be stingy with your admiration for your husband.

Finally, and perhaps most difficult of all, the wife is called to give her husband reverence. She is not to worship her husband, for she has been told in no uncertain terms that she must have no other gods before the One true God. But her husband has been given her as Christ's representative in her family. In her husband, if she sees him through eyes of faith, she can see the glory of her Lord. She can worship and revere Christ by admiring and honoring and glorying in her husband. The glory she gives her husband pleases Christ, and is received by Him as part of His own due worship. A godly husband rejoices in the honor shown him as the fruit of his wife's worship of her Lord Jesus Christ.

We are told that “the woman is the glory of the man.” A Christian wife is a thing of great beauty in all ways. In her purity and selflessness, she shines forth the glory of her husband before her family and all the world (1 Cor 11:7). A biblical marriage — the true union of a man and his wife — is a faithful picture of Christ and the Church. It brings glory to our Heavenly Father, whose design marriage is.