

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them. God looked at each thing that He had made and He was satisfied with His work: He saw that it was good. But there was one thing that God made which did not satisfy Him: the man. God looked at the man and said, "It is not good." Something was missing. "It is not good for man to be alone." God said, so He made a woman and everything was good again.

It can't be that God made a mistake: He never does. He must have intended it to be that way. God deliberately made man so that He needed help. Now why did He go and do a thing like that? After all, He could have planned it differently — and saved us all a lot of trouble!

Marriage Was God's Idea

Right at the beginning of time God introduced the concept of marriage as part of human experience and laid down principles on which every marriage should be built. God said that every marriage should be exclusive, intimate and permanent.¹

In the later books of the Old Testament God develops the concept. He introduces us to the word covenant and tells us that husbands and wives are bound by a covenant to one another.² He surprises us with a love song that describes an intense, passionate relationship in which a bride and groom are overwhelmed by mutual desire and delight.³ He warns repeatedly that to break the marriage covenant is a most dreadful thing⁴ But still He does not tell us why. Why marriage?

Why?

There are little hints in the Old Testament: times when God uses marriage to illustrate some point about His relationship with Israel, like the times when He accuses Israel of adultery because the people have forsaken Him,⁵ but we only really understand why God invented marriage when we come to Ephesians 5: when Paul says, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

By building marriage into human experience God did something that we often do when we teach our children. When we have to teach a concept that is beyond their understanding we introduce them to something that they can identify with and then draw comparisons between that and the more difficult concept. To teach them about numbers and mathematics we encourage them to play with wooden blocks and show them what happens when we put them together or take some away. God, in order to teach us about the kind of relationship that should exist between the Lord Jesus Christ and His bride,

¹ Genesis 2:24

² Malachi 2:14

³ Song Of Solomon

⁴ e.g. Leviticus 20:10

⁵ e.g. Jeremiah 3:8-9

the Church — that new society of which we are all part — built something into our experience that would help us to understand. That is the purpose of marriage.

That Puts It In Perspective!

That puts a whole new perspective on your marriage doesn't it? As you work to build and maintain your marriage — and let's be honest, it is hard work — you are learning: learning about the love of Jesus for you; learning about your love for Him. But you are not just learning, you are also performing a drama: you are living out an illustration: a teaching aid. You are demonstrating to your friends and neighbours, to your children and to the angels who look on⁶ the kind of relationship that exists between Jesus and His people. And that is why you wives must submit to the authority of your husbands.

“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 Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in everything.”

A Poor Deal?

At first sight that looks like a pretty poor deal for wives, but it isn't. We only think it is because we look at it with minds that are influenced by the world we live in more than they are by the Word of God, so let's look at it in a biblical perspective.

The first thing that needs to be said is that the idea of bowing to the will of another person should not seem strange to any child of God. Willing subjection that puts other people first: subjection motivated by delight in serving the God who gave His Son for us, is part of daily life for every true believer. Isn't it?

Remember too that the idea of living under authority should not cause us any difficulty. It is not an idea that the world around us holds in high esteem but we know, from our reading of the Bible, that all along God has envisaged a world in which everyone lives under authority: Children must obey their parents; wives must obey their husbands; husbands are subject to Christ; we are all subject to the authority of government; every believer must obey the elders of the church. Authority gives structure to society. Without it there would be anarchy and chaos. Just look around you and see what lack of respect for authority is doing to the world. As Christian people, today more than ever, we need to set an example: against the tide of modern opinion we must assert that people in authority are to be respected and obeyed, even when we disagree with them, and where better to begin to set that example than in our own homes, before our children.

Next, we get confused when we think that a woman who submits to the authority of her husband is somehow inferior to him. That may be how the world sees it, but it is not how the Bible represents things. It is possible to submit to someone's authority and yet remain his equal because submission to authority, as God sees it, is to do with roles and not to do with value. Take the Trinity as an example. We know and declare when we recite our creeds and confessions that the Father and the Son are equal: both are God; neither is better than the other. But it is also true that the Lord Jesus Christ voluntarily submits to the authority of His Father. It is not that He makes Himself inferior; it is just that their roles are different. The same is true of husbands and wives. A wife is not inferior to her husband — in fact God reminds husbands to honour their wives as fellow heirs of the grace of life⁷ — but she is different. She has a different role. Her husband's responsibility is to lead and hers is to be the kind of helper he needs.

⁶ Ephesians 3:10

⁷ 1 Peter 3:7

Again we get things wrong when we think that a wife who submits to the authority of her husband will become a robot who lacks initiative, loss her own personality and sacrifice her right to think. Again that is not how the Bible portrays it. Take a look at Proverbs 31. That chapter describes the kind of woman God holds up as an example to every wife and mother. Probably, when you read it, your first thought will be, "I could never do all that." Well, it does not say you have to: that is not the point. Rather, the chapter should give you an idea of the kind of person a wife who submits to the authority of her husband can be. Here are some points to take note of:

- A good wife is someone who is highly valued (verse 10).
- She is respected and trusted (verse 11).
- She works hard to provide for her family (verses 13–15).
- She buys property and manages it (verse 16).
- She finds satisfaction in her work (verse 18).
- She cares for others (verse 20).
- She runs a business (verse 24).
- She is known for her wisdom (verse 26).
- She manages her own household and is probably responsible for the family budget (verse 27).
- She is honoured by her husband and children and praised by all (verse 28–31).

That is no downtrodden slave!

To submit to the authority of your husband is not to accept a poor deal, it is merely to acknowledge that you are different. God has assigned your husband a particular role and you have been assigned a different one.

Your Job Description

Everyone has a job description these days, and why should wives be an exception. The fact is God has described the role that you, as a wife, are called to. It is summed up in Genesis 2:18: you are to be a helper suited to your husband. Your job is to use all your skill, knowledge and wisdom to help him to be the best man that he can possibly be. Taking account of his weaknesses you are to become the other piece in the jigsaw puzzle that makes up the whole picture. It is not good for him to be alone. He needs you. Without you he is not complete.

The Basic Qualifications

That is a big job! And if you want to do it well, it would do no harm to have some training, it might surprise you to know that God has prescribed a basic training programme for young women. You can find it in Titus 2:4–5.

The most striking thing about it is the emphasis on home and family life. Young women are to be taught to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, to be pure, to be homemakers — or workers at home as some translations put it — and to be obedient to their husbands.

Love Your Husband

When Paul wrote to Titus that young women are to be taught to love their husbands he used a Greek word that represents tender affection: tender affection not as a passing feeling but as a quality of character. A wife's whole manner is to convey tender affection toward her husband. Cherishing him above everyone else she is to hold her husband in high esteem and always display that kind of warmth and welcome that makes home the best place in the whole world: a place to relax; a place of security; a place of refuge from the pressures of a sinful world; a place of beauty and happiness.

There are some wives who grow cold toward their husbands. They become preoccupied with other concerns: work; children; domestic duties. They become resentful toward their husbands and their overall attitude is demanding. Nothing more quickly destroys a relationship.

Love Your Children

That same warmth and tender affection is to be demonstrated by mothers toward their children. It will show in patient teaching of the things of God; discipline administered with dignity, consistency and fairness; the kiss that takes the pain out of a grazed knee; the hug that causes bad dreams to fly away; the welcoming smile that greets them when they come home from school and says, "Mummy is here and all is well with the world;" the whole demeanour which says, "You are precious."

So often we get caught up in the business of life. Our lives are so full that we are too busy to love. Always be someone who has time to be tender.

Be Sensible

Sensibility is the next basic requirement, and there is more to this word too than meets the eye. It means to show balance and self-restraint and to have feelings that are kept under the control of sound judgement and a well-taught mind, and that surely is something that is contrary to the spirit of today. It means having a mind saturated in and controlled by the standards of God's Word, and you do not come by that without some hard work, but it also means denying self and living with an eye to duty.

Be Pure

Purity shows in that kind of conversation that cleanses and refreshes others and reflects a heart that is set on the things of God. It shows in embarrassment by sin and modesty in dress. It draws respect from others and if your life reflects the kind of purity of which we are talking, even the hardest sinner will be ashamed in your company.

Be A Worker At Home

According to some records the duties of a Hebrew wife and mother were to "Grind flour, bake, cook, launder, make the beds, spin wool, keep the house, attend to guests and take responsibility for hospitality, nurse children and oversee their early training." and these are probably the kind of the things Paul had in mind when he urged that young women should be taught to be workers at home. Not that a husband should not be involved in these things: he should certainly know how to do them, but in any establishment the various jobs to be done are distributed to different people and these are the ones that, in the home, ought to fall to the wife.

If that is the case it is important to be skilled in them. Are you? Have you studied and practiced to be the best that you can be? You see we are now in a situation where, because we have underrated the value of skills like these, they are being lost. We have a generation who struggle to know how to keep a home and if that is how it is now, what will it be like in the next generation?

Be Good

Goodness is a fruit of the Spirit.⁸ What is in mind is a deep inner and pervasive goodness: goodness through and through. Covet this quality. It is to be found in the way of obedience and communion with God. Cultivate it through practice.

Just Imagine

Look back over this list of qualities and try to imagine the kind of place your home would be if you cultivated them to the full. Imagine the influence you could have. Imagine the effect upon your husband and children. Imagine the atmosphere that would prevail and imagine the impression it would leave upon your visitors. Isn't that what you want?

These are the basic qualifications for the job God has given you to do. Have you learned them and learned them well? Have you put as much effort into learning them as you have put into gaining other professional qualifications? Are you passing them on to your daughters?

One Last Thought

If God spoke to you clearly and asked you to serve him in the depths of some disease infested South American jungle among cannibals and head-hunters, would you go? Would you take up the cross and deny yourself? He has clearly asked you to do something harder than that, and he has written it down for you.

“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 Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in everything.”

Equal to your husband? Of course you are, but are you equal to the job God has given you to do?

With His help you are more than equal!

Some Things For You To Do

Read the following passages of Scripture with your family over the next week. Talk about what you read together, make sure you have all understood it and think about what it might mean for your family.

Genesis 2:18-25 What does God mean when He says “...a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh?”

Proverbs 31 What benefits can a good wife and mother bring to a home?

Titus 2:4-5 How should young women be taught the skills listed in these verses?

1 Timothy 2:9-14 Some people would say that Paul's teaching about women being under the authority of men was a concession to the culture of His day. What is Paul's own answer to that opinion (verses 13 and 14)?

1 Peter 3:1-6 What should a wife do when she does not like the lead her husband is giving?

⁸ Galatians 5:22



If marriage is meant to teach us about the relationship between the Lord Jesus and the Church, how can your marriage help you understand and appreciate the love God has for you?



The comparison between marriage and our relationship with the Lord can also be usefully applied in the other direction. How can knowing the love of God help you to be a better husband or wife?

Just For Wives



Make a list of as many things as you can think of that you could do in order to be a better wife. Don't show the list to anyone else but keep it and prayerfully work through it and do as many of those things as you can. This time next year look back at your list and see how much you have changed.