

Indicatives & Imperatives in the Household, 2

Ephesians

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Let us open God's word tonight to Ephesians 5 as we continue our study through the book of Ephesians and we have come now to Ephesians 5:22-24. This is the second installment of these verses. This technically would be the third sermon dealing with the subject matter of the household, and I would encourage you if you were not here to hear those messages from those verses beginning with chapter 5, verse 21, I'd encourage you to go back and listen to those. They are intended to be taken as a whole. But our text tonight, let me read the entire paragraph here, verses 22 to 24 of Ephesians 5.

Let us hear God's word.

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Thus ends the reading of God's word tonight.

Let us pray.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for giving us divine revelation concerning this glorious institution of marriage that you have instituted. Lord, we pray that you would help us in thinking our thoughts after you. Lord, we ask that you would illumine us tonight to this text. I pray, Father, that you would grant your servant unction in delivering your word faithfully and I pray that you would give each of us ears to hear discerningly and we pray, Father, that above all, that your Spirit would work this word into our hearts and our lives. We pray all of these things for your glory and our good in Jesus' name. Amen.

You may be seated.

In our last two messages in Ephesians, we have found Paul teaching us about divinely ordered relationships that involve a party in a station of authority and a party that is in the station of subjection, a party to whom submission is to be rendered, and a party who exercises submission to another. I would encourage you, once again, if you were not here to listen particularly to the message on verse 21. The title of that sermon was "Submission as God's Idea," wherein the biblical meaning of submission was elucidated and considered in depth, and it's from that meaning of submission that we are to understand Paul's application of submission in this next section of Ephesians where he takes up several divinely-ordered relationships involving authority and submission.

As we moved forward into verses 22 and 24, we considered the marriage relationship as the first of several divinely-ordered relationships that Paul will address. We discovered last week that central to holding proper categories in relationship to marriage is holding biblical categories. We are truly to think our thoughts after God and if we're to do so, we must employ not the categories of the latest trend in family counseling but we must first employ the categories provided to us in holy Scripture. Indeed, it's most wise for us to consult the Creator and Designer of marriage who is God, himself, about how he has designed it and how he has wired it before we attempt to opine about what we believe will make for a healthy marriage.

As we approach Ephesians 5:22 and following, we quickly find that the categories of indicative and imperative are crucial in coming to grips with Paul's understanding of the marriage institution. As we saw, the indicative statement is simply a statement of fact, while an imperative statement is a statement of command or instruction. We find in verse 22 Paul issuing forth an imperative that we saw last week, and then he turns in verse 23 and he roots that imperative in an indicative. What does he write in verse 22 to the wife? He gives the wife an imperative, "submit to your own husbands," you see, that's a statement of command, but then he roots that imperative in an indicative in verse 23 for he turns and says, "For the husband is head of the wife." There it is, a statement of fact. In other words, the wife is to do something because the husband is something. Let me say that again. In other words, what he's saying is the wife is to do something, an imperative, because the husband is something, an indicative. Herein we find that crucial distinction between role and duty. Role is an indicative matter. Role addresses who a person is in the relationship, the station that he or she holds, but duty is an imperative matter. Duty

addresses what the person ought to do within that particular relationship, the instructions and the commands in it.

Last week, we took a step back and we considered the husbands and wives duties towards one another as chief neighbors. The wife being the chief neighbor of the husband, the husband being the chief neighbor of the wife, both to render love to one another as we are called to love our neighbors accordingly. Tonight, we're going to consider specifically the role, there again distinguishing that from duty, the indicative, the role of the wife in this divinely ordered relationship called marriage. We're first going to consider the wife's role as wife, and you'll understand what I mean by that in a moment. We'll, secondly, consider the wife's role in the negative and then we'll consider the wife's role in the positive. Once again, we're dealing not with duties, even though it's difficult, these things so much overlap you want to move from one to the other real quickly, but we're going to try in a self-contained way deal with the indicative of the wife.

First, the wife's role as wife. The definition of wife is just simply a female who is in a legal relationship with a man in this union called marriage. We're going to, first, need to make a very general observation regarding the wife as wife. It is important to be mindful, brothers and sisters, that when wife is used, it is not a statement regarding her role in relationship to men generally, but it's a statement regarding her role in a specific relationship to a specific man. Paul is not addressing women as women in this passage. He is addressing women as wives in this passage. It would be a gross error, and I trust you many have done it, it would be a gross error to take the subject of submission in this passage and try to apply it to women in general in their relationships to men. For example, to posit that a woman may not have a role in society that is one of authority, like owning a business, for instance, because, after all, she's a woman and must always be in subjection to men, that would be a gross misunderstanding and application of what Paul is writing here. Women do not have a divinely-ordered relationship to men in general. Wives do have a divinely-ordered relationship with their husbands specifically so let us be ever-mindful that Ephesians 5:22-24, Paul is addressing the wife's role as a wife and not as a woman.

Let us move, secondly, to the wife's role in the negative. Note that Paul actually begins his treatment of the wife in this marital relationship by defining her role in the negative and not in the positive. Remember a moment ago I made this observation of indicative/imperative in saying that the wife is called to do something because the husband is something? Well, after writing that the wife is to submit herself to her husband, Paul then writes, "For," or because, "the husband is head." In other words, the wife's role must first be understood in terms of what it is not. Much of what can be said about the role of the wife is found in the statement that the husband is head and the woman is not head in the relationship. There are many problems in marriage relationships because of a failure to grasp this most important indicative concept. Indicatives concern roles, the station that one is in the relationship, and it's important to Paul that wives understand that their station in the relationship is not head. In fact, for her to properly understand her duty to her husband, she must see her duty as rooted in the fact that she is not something.

You see that. This, again, reminds us of the ontological economical distinction that we have discussed before. Persons in a divinely-ordered relationship are ontologically identical. They, in their beings, have equality and are identical with one another, but they are economically distinguished. They are distinguished by their functions, their roles within that relationship, and their roles are not identical. So what Paul is highlighting here is something that's economic, something about the function or the roles within the marriage relationship. He is clearly distinguishing her role as wife from the husband's role and what he's stating here simply is that the wife does not hold the position of rule in the relationship, the wife does not hold the position of authority in the relationship. The wife is not the ultimate decision-maker in the relationship, she's not the leader in that relationship. To use Paul's language elsewhere, she is not the manager of the household.

While there is much to say about the husband's indicative as head, and we shall get there, I assure you, it's important to the apostle that wives understand their indicative in the negative. She is not head. Attempting to blur the authority given to the husband is not something that yields health in the relationship, it only yields hurt in the relationship. Yes, this flies counter to everything the modern American egalitarian spirit regarding marriage, but brothers and sisters, we humbly must recognize that this is how the Bible describes the marriage union that God has wired. The one who has wired the relationship is telling us how he has wired it, how he's created it, and how he's instituted it. To go against and to militate against the way that he tells us he has wired the marriage relationship, again, yields hurt and not health.

Now on the one hand, this fact that the wife is not head should bring tremendous relief to the wife, that she does not bear the heavy burdens that only the head carries. That's perhaps the reason why you find Paul spending much much much more time on the male, the husband in the relationship and not very much on the wife. In fact, when he is speaking about the wife's role and duty, he can't escape talking about him, the husband. Even when he talks about the duties of the wife, he can't escape saying, "Remember that he is the head. It's because he is the head that you are to submit." But on the other hand, while on the one hand it should bring much relief, on the other it should also be very sobering to the wife that she is not the head.

We sometimes hear this kind of language used about marriage, usually it's laughingly, when in a marriage relationship where a woman attempts to assume the role of head in the marriage, we'll hear language like, "Boy, it is evident who rules the roost in that relationship." Do you hear that word "rule"? It's evident who rules the roost in that relationship. Or you hear language such as, "Boy, it's evident who wears the pants in that relationship." You see, that is not in any way a healthy sign. That's not a healthy sign that there is a proper understanding of the roles in that relationship, rather it could very well be an indication that the man who is head is being a poor head, a bad head, more to come on that, and an indication that the woman who is not head is attempting to assume the role of head that was never given to her. Now we'll discuss this more next week and in the weeks to follow, but God does not say submit to him when he's a good head, but assume his role when he's a bad head. We never find that in the Scriptures. No,

submission is called for, recognizing one's indicative in the relationship and the other's indicative in the relationship, and as we move into the role of husband as head, I would encourage you who are wives to hear those things that when we speak about the husband and his indicatives and his imperatives, to have the mindset that all of those things are not what you're called to. That's all that will be said about the indicative of the husband. Just keep in the back of your mind that all of those things are not what you are called to in your role. So in Ephesians 5, when Paul moves into the indicatives of marriage and the imperatives of marriage, the first indicative that he gives the wife is in the negative, and I cannot state enough how important that is in grasping that her role is not head.

Now that's considering the wife's role in the negative, let's consider the wife's role in the positive and there are two items here that are worth our attention. If the wife is not head, then what role was she originally given in this marital relationship that yields her a submissive party in the relationship? Well, what this is going to do is it's going to bring us back to the origin of marriage altogether, bringing us back to Genesis 2. If you recall, the Scripture tells us that God took the man, he put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it. Now this is before he ever created woman. That's very important. When he took the man, put the man in the garden of Eden, that is, a garden within Eden, and he called him to work it and to keep it. He called him to labor and it's important to keep in mind that he called him to this task of labor, again, prior to the creation of woman.

Now as Genesis 2 unfolds, woman is created and given to the man as a wife so we find the Lord saying this, "It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helpmate suitable for him and the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into woman and he brought her unto the man." Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.'" So we find the original indicative of a woman in her role is that of helpmate. That's who she is. That is her role in this relationship. She will be a bad helpmate or she'll be a good helpmate but she inescapably is a helpmate in the relationship. To militate, again, against this God-given role does not result in health but in hurt in the relationship.

Now this role as helpmate was not only designed for addressing the issues of isolation and propagation, which certainly it was, but also it was a supporting and an assisting of his call, hence the helpmate. When Paul writes to the church at Corinth regarding headship, it's interesting that Paul needs to remind them of the order of creation. He takes them back to Genesis so as to highlight the indicative of the husband in relation to the wife. He writes, "Man was not made from woman but the woman from man, neither was man made for a woman but the woman for the man." Paul is simply establishing the principle that the creation of helpmate was not a divine afterthought but the creation of helpmate, again after the creation of Adam, forever established the line of God's created order. The woman was created for the help of the man, not the other way around. Man was called to a task from the beginning and the wife was called after she was created, to aiding and supporting the task of the husband. In a certain way, the husband is defined by the vocation to which he is called while the wife is defined by the man to whom she is called. There are all kinds of implications surrounding this truth, especially in a culture that is rife with temptations to see the husband's vocation as equal to that of his wife, if

not primarily to support the vocation of his wife, which is a reversal of the way that we find it in holy Scripture.

Now while much more could be said about the indicative of the wife as helpmate in the relationship, this does give us much insight, I believe, into what Paul states in Ephesians 5 regarding the woman not being the head of the relationship, for as helpmate, she was never given to the husband to be his head but she was given as a helpmate to her husband to support him and to help him and to aid him in his calling. But not only is she helpmate but she is also something else. There's another indicative and that indicative, let me just give it out straight here, is church-mirror, just a hyphenated word. She is church-mirror. Now we will delve more into the implications of this when we get to her duties, but after Paul identifies the husband's indicative as head as paralleling Christ's indicative as head, he then identifies the wife's station as paralleling that of the church's station.

In verse 24 of chapter 5 of Ephesians we find Paul clearly writing here, "just as the church is subject to Christ," or submits to Christ, "so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." In this marital relationship, just as the husband inescapably mirrors Christ, more to come on that, the wife inescapably mirrors the church. Her position or her role in the marriage is one of church-mirror. Now in other words, and this is something that I'll expound upon even more when we get to the husband as head, but here with the wife as being identified as a church-mirror, she preaches something about the reality of the church whether she wants it or not because it's an indicative, it is who she is. She is a church-mirror and she is preaching a sermon about the reality of the church. Now the sermon will either be truthful concerning the church or it will be a lie concerning the church, but she inescapably preaches, if you will, the reality of the church and its relationship to Christ.

So for wives, this piercing question comes forth: what sermon is your life preaching? Because of the indicative that you hold in this marital relationship if you are a wife, you are a church-mirror, just as the husband is going to be a Christ-mirror and he cannot help but speak about Jesus and it will be a lie or it will be truthful, and we'll get to his sermon in another sermon. But the wife is preaching a sermon as well. Is your life as a wife saying what is true concerning the church's relationship to Christ or is it saying something false about the church's relationship to Christ? We're going to deal with this even more when we get to the duties involved in submission, but please at least take note now that there is an indicative in the wife's role in the marriage that's inescapable. You're a mirror whether you like it or not, as the man is going to be a mirror whether he likes it or not. But you are a mirror of the church in her relationship to Christ.

So brothers and sisters, in conclusion apart from the duties that Paul places on the wife which we will consider at another time, what we have considered tonight should be our starting principles when we consider the whole subject of the role of the wife in a marital relationship. Now they are principles. Principles are not intended to detail out every variable that life brings. There is much wisdom that's called for in the application of principles but principles do not intend to detail every variable that life brings, but they are to guide our thinking in this most important matter of the indicatives in a marriage

relationship. Let these principles be that guidance to help us think our thoughts after God, and I do trust and hope that even this evening to those who are wives, that these principles help in guiding your thinking in thinking, again, God's thoughts after him because there's much that is competing with these things, a wife's role as a wife, secondly, the wife's role in the negative, that she is not a head, and the wife's role in the positive, she is helpmate, she is church-mirror.

Now brothers and sisters, we as a body, whether you are one who is in a marital relationship or not in a marital relationship, all of us learn something about ourselves in this because all of us are in a marriage with the Lord Jesus Christ. We as a body, as the church of Jesus Christ, are married to the Lord Jesus. Of course, we are the church of which the wife is a mirror, a church whose station is one of submission, so let us learn from our wives, let us learn from those whom we know who are wives. Let us learn that none of us are head, that is reserved solely for Jesus Christ who is head of this relationship of a marriage that he has with his church, and we are functioning as we ought as we subject ourselves to our head, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is husband of his wife.

It is this that we should see in the wife and as we see our wives submitting joyfully, as we see wives who are functioning in not poor but in a healthy good way as helpmate, we should see the church in that very thing. We should even see ourselves as the church as we see wives in this glorious role that God has gifted to her showing us what we ought to be as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, joyfully submitting ourselves to the Lord Jesus in this relationship that we have with him. Let us be mindful that underlying all of this is this beautiful sermon illustration of what we ought to be as the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we do thank you for this instruction, there is so much instruction that you give us here and insight that you give us in terms of roles and duties and, Father, I lift up to you the wives of this particular body, this church body, and Lord, I pray that you would grant much grace to these women that you have called into these relationships and, Father, I pray that you would give them much insight into their role as has been considered tonight in Ephesians 5 and Genesis 2. Father, I pray that you would be merciful to each of them and may you, Father, mold their hearts in their roles as wives as we also call upon you to mold the hearts of husbands in their role in the relationship. Lord, may we see that the health that we so long for in marriage does have much to do with indicative matters as much as they are with imperative matters. Lord, help us to properly digest these indicatives that you have given to the wife in her relationship to her husband. Father, I pray whether we are in a marital relationship or not, that we as a church body would see in this role you've given in this special relationship, a mirror of what we ought to be as we subject ourselves joyfully to our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. For it is in his name that we pray. Amen.