

Walking Wisely in Our Marriages

Wisdom for Wives – Part 1

Palmetto Baptist Church

Biblical Texts:

Ephesians 5:22-24, 33 – Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also should wives submit to their husbands.

Colossians 3:18 – Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Titus 2:1-5 – But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God might not be reviled.

Introduction:

We have been making our way through the book of Ephesians in an effort to understand what God is doing for His glory so that we can live in ways that accomplish His divine purpose.

In order to accomplish His purposes, God has chosen a group of people and made them full members of His household. He has formed them into a living community and established His Son, Jesus as their leader/head. He has also sent His Spirit to indwell them so that they would be enlightened, enabled, equipped, and encouraged to accomplish His plan and advance His purposes.

Most importantly, out of His deep love for them, God has lavished His people with grace, mercy, and wisdom (Eph 1:4; 2:4-7; 3:10).

As people who have been granted wisdom so lavishly, how should they now live? How should this wisdom shape their thinking and affect their behavior?

This is an important consideration because of:

1. *Who* and *What* they are –

- people who have been adopted into God’s family and made full and equal members of His household,
- people who are led by God’s Son,
- people who are indwelt by God’s Spirit,
- people who have been enlivened, enlightened, enabled, and equipped by for God’s service.

2. *Where* and *When* they are –

- They have been taken out of the kingdom of darkness and permanently placed into the kingdom of God’s Son.
- They have been made full participants in God’s plan and granted full access into God’s presence.
- They have been given massive spiritual blessings in the spiritual realm while they live for God in this earthly, physical realm.
- They are living at a particular point in time with regard to the unfolding of God’s plan – that time is called the “fullness of time” (1:9-10) and it is being lived out in this present evil age (2:1-3) when the days are characterized and marked by moral wickedness (5:16).

3. *Why* they are –

- to bring glory to God the Father in every generation,
- to display the wisdom of God by showing the power of the gospel to transform daily life in this age as well as in the age to come.
- to display the beauty of the Gospel by displaying lives that are marked by its grace, goodness, and blessing.

And in order to do this ... these people need a wisdom that counters the wisdom of this world, that is different than their own natural desires or human thinking – they need a wisdom from above!

And God has given them this wisdom for living in the passage we are considering over the next several weeks – Ephesians 5:22-6:9. This morning we are going to look at how this wisdom serves Christian Wives.

I. The Importance of this Wisdom

A. Due to its Biblical Context

God gives a particular wisdom to Christian households in four different places in the NT. This wisdom is often referred to as the “household codes” and it gives wisdom by which Christian men and women can arrange their homes in order to glorify God and advance the gospel around them. This wisdom contains instruction for all the members of a Christian household – this morning we are looking at the wisdom God gives to wives.

1. Ephesians 5:22-24, 33 – follow and support the spiritual leadership of the husband God gave you.
2. Colossians 3:18 – follow and support in such a way that prompts and cultivates His love for you.
3. Titus 2:3-5 – display love and affection for your husband in ways that advance the Gospel and that guard against the Word of God being reviled by outsiders.
4. 1 Peter 3:1-6 – wisdom for living with a husband who is disobedient to the Gospel – an unbelieving husband.

This wisdom for wives is not just important because of the number of times it is mentioned in the NT, it is important because of its source.

B. Due to its Divine Source

In contrast to the conventional wisdom at Ephesus in Paul’s day and the wisdom commonly presented in our day, the wisdom contained in this text comes from a very different source – a loving God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and all-wise in all that He does for His glory and the good of His people.

He has given a specific wisdom for His people in the Scripture that is to be their wisdom in the sight of the nations (Dt. 4:6-8). This wisdom is good (Dt. 6:24) and it is sufficient for life and godliness (2 Timothy 3:16). In other words, this wisdom is:

- grounded in His infinite wisdom

- designed by His loving goodness
- explained by an all-sufficient Scripture
- Empowered by His enabling grace
- Presented as an important component of Gospel advancement

C. Due to its Spiritual Objective

Given the nature of the instruction before us, we need to remind ourselves as to its true spiritual objective – what is God up to and why does He ask this of Christian wives/husbands, children/fathers, and servants/masters?

The objective is not to serve and advance the purposes of a particular male leader in a household or to make life easier or happier for him. She is not merely a glorified domestic servant.

In fact, when a Christian wife actually follows the wisdom that God gives in these texts that talk about her submission, it may actually make life more difficult for a husband who is not following the Lord, obeying His Word, or living for His purposes.

Rather, the purpose of this wisdom is to:

1. Display the beauty of God’s shalom by establishing it in a Christian marriage.
 - God has made a peace through the work of Christ and has established that peace between Jew and Gentile (2:13-18).
 - He now desires that same “shalom” to flavor all of the relational components of a Christian household, the foremost of which is the relationship between the husband and the wife in that home.
2. Declare God’s triumph over the spiritual forces of darkness by restoring displaying proper order in a Christian household.
 - There are powerful spiritual forces who actively oppose the establishment of God’s “shalom” – they seek to undermine it, damage it, or destroy it by creating distance and division among God’s people both in the church (Eph 4:1-3) and in their households.

- A Christian couple who consistently lived out shalom would be a powerful display of the triumph God won through Christ over these enemies.
3. Demonstrate the power of God's grace to help us comprehend what God is doing and to enable such living by overcoming the flesh that fiercely resists and opposes this wisdom (Eph 3:16-19)

So...given the importance of this wisdom – who exactly is receiving it? Who are its recipients? If this were a personal letter, who is the intended recipient?

II. The Recipients of this Wisdom

Note – there is a fairly important assumption Paul is making as he writes these instructions and that is that the recipients are genuine believers who desire and are attempting to please the Lord, follow His word, and give glad and willing obedience to His will.

A. All Genuine Believers – (5:15-21, 33)

Paul wanted everyone who was part of the Ephesian church to know this information regardless of their status or place in the household. Everyone got all the information at the same time so that the expectations were clear to all and that no one could later say, well, either I did not know the information or I did not think that information really applied to me.

This information was given in the context of the teaching ministry of the Church and it was being delivered by one of its founding elders who also was an apostle.

There were teaching elders at Ephesus (4:11-12) whose job it was to instruct, clarify, and help the believers apply this information to their households.

There were believers in various households who could encourage and help motivate or stir up one another to “good works” (Heb 10:24).

So this information was designed for particular members of each Christian household but it was given clearly and authoritatively to all so that everyone would understand and could encourage, support, and pray for one another (1 Thess 5:14)

B. Christian Husbands – (5:25-33)

While the information we are looking at this morning is to Christian wives, it comes in the larger context of a much longer set of instructions that are given to Christian Husbands.

Husbands are to understand that part of their gracious servant-leadership to their wives is to understand exactly what God has asked their wife to do so that they do not ask more of her than what God has asked.

Further, they are to understand that God has designed His expectations for a Christian wife to work best in a specific context where her Christian husband is leading and loving her in a specific way.

While her obedience to Christ is not conditioned on the obedience of her husband, it was designed to function best where her husband has created a relational environment where her obedience can be rendered willingly, joyfully, and without fear or hindrance.

In other words – the submission God asks of our wives will only thrive when it is offered in the context of a Christian Husband who is rendering grace-enabled obedience to what God has

asked of him as he fulfills the responsibility God has assigned to him as the head of his household.

Most importantly – the submission God has asked of his wife must be accompanied by a proper use of the authority and power that God has assigned to him – and that authority and power was not given for the purpose of him controlling or dominating his wife. Instead, he is to use his power and authority in the way that Christ uses His – to serve, benefit, and bless His wife.

C. Christian Wives (5:22-24)

- The specific person addressed in the first part of this household code is a Christian wife.
- In Paul’s day, most of these women would be married by the time they were 15 and would have had several children by the time they were 20. The average lifespan of a woman in Paul’s day was between 30-45 years of age.
- Growing up, she would have been expected to give unquestioned obedience to her father.
- Her marriage would most likely have been arranged by her father and love would have had very little to do with her marriage – marriages were often arranged in order to advance the household of her Father.
- At her marriage ceremony, her father would place her hand in the hand of her husband thereby transferring all his authority over her to her husband. This ceremony was called “Manus” (Latin for “hand”). However, by the time Paul wrote Ephesians, many father’s did not want to lose the advantage of having full authority over their daughters even after marriage and so they would marry their daughters “sine manus” – without placing her hand in that of her husband. Such a wife would render obedience in certain areas to her new husband but her allegiance, loyalty, and full obedience still rested with her Father and his household.

- In her new role as wife, she would be expected to follow her husband's gods, to work to advance his standing and social status in society, to oversee and conduct the affairs of his household in ways that secured the economic advancement of the household.

And in the midst of all of this structure and expectations, God had saved Christian husbands and Christian Wives and is giving each of them specific instructions that would radically transform their marriages.

And one of the most important pieces of transformative information was who this Christian wife was to follow, support, and give her full allegiance to even if her father had retained his authority in her marriage ceremony. A Christian wife was to give her allegiance, support, and glad obedience to her own husband. She was to respect and honor her father but she was no longer subject to him but to her husband regardless of any intention the marriage ceremony had when it was carried out.

Paul is basing this instruction on creation design and at Ephesus, it stood in stark contradiction to the cultural norms and expectations of many pagan marriages.

III. The Motive for this Wisdom

A. *This is what pleases God*

- *Eph 5:8-10* For at one time you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.
- *Eph 5:17* Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

B. *This is what Christ commands and merits*

- *Eph 5:22-23* Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church

submits to Christ, so also should wives submit in everything to their husbands.

C. This is what is fitting to sound doctrine

- *Colossians 3:18 – Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*
- *Titus 2:1-5 – But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine... Older women likewise are ... to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God might not be reviled.*

D. This is what will advance and protect the Gospel

- *Titus 2:1-5 – But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine... that the word of God might not be reviled.*

IV. The Content of this Wisdom for Christian Wives

There are four NT texts that give specific instruction that makes up the wisdom that God gave to Christian wives. Each text contributes something to the whole picture. Three of the texts assume that the wife is married to a Christian husband who desires to love, follow, and obey Christ as she does. The fourth text – which we will look at next week – gives important information to wives who are married to husbands who are not believers.

When taken together, the three Pauline texts (Ephesians 5:22-24, 33; Col 3:18; and Titus 2:1-5) give three main instructions to Christian women who desire to please God in their marriages.

A. Support Your Husband's Leadership as He Follows Christ (Eph 5:22-24).

- The idea here is not that you are to get a list of tasks done each day that your husband left for you to do ... not mere rote obedience.

- The idea here is that you are putting your full weight and support behind your husband as the leader God gave you and your household.
- You follow his leadership willingly and wholeheartedly as unto the Lord – this is actually how you serve Christ.
- You support his leadership fully – in all things and in every area of your marriage – just like you support and follow Christ in every area as a full member of His Church.

B. Make it easy for your husband to love and serve you (Col 3:19)

- Just like husbands will struggle with their flesh to fulfill the responsibilities God has given them for their wives, their wives will also struggle to fulfill their responsibilities.
- Husbands are warned about a particular temptation they will have in their marriage as they try to lead their wives by loving and serving them – due to the imperfections and sin nature of their wives, they as husbands will at times be tempted to grow bitter at their wife’s unwillingness, inability, or inconsistency in some aspect of her submission to his leadership.
- The term “harsh” is actually the word “bitter” – something that becomes sour or distasteful. Peter is warning Christian men that there will be a very real danger when living with their Christian wife that they will, over time, encounter things that will be sour to them and they are to guard their hearts lest they become sour and harsh toward their wives because of a particular thing that they find difficult or distasteful about what their wife is doing.
- And while men are not given an excuse for becoming bitter and are held accountable by God for sinning so against their wives – part of a wife’s support of her husband is to do all she can to help him follow and obey the Lord.
- A wise wife will do all she can reasonably do to make it easy for her husband to love and serve her within the bounds of Scripture, her own conscience, and according to the gifts God has given her.

C. Love and Serve God by loving and serving those in your household – your husband and your children (Titus 2:1-5)

*Titus 2:1-5 – But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine... Older women ... are to teach what is good, and so **train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands**, that the word of God might not be reviled.*

Paul tells Titus to help believers at Crete by teaching them what accords with sound/healthy doctrine. Part of that involved spiritually mature women teaching and encouraging younger women to live in very specific ways in their marriages:

1. They were to cultivate a specific heart response toward their husbands and their children – genuine love and affection.
2. They were to cultivate genuine Christian character that displayed itself in self-controlled responses and in spiritually pure living that was acceptable to God.
3. They were to cultivate and display a consistent approach to their role and responsibility – diligent oversight and management of the household affairs (often complex) in ways that were kind (good) and that resulted in the good of the household and not its damage or demise.
4. They were to display appropriate social and personal decorum by arranging themselves under and supporting their husband's leadership and position as head of the family.

V. The Boundaries and Constraints of this Wisdom for Christian Wives

- There are important and significant boundaries that God has placed before a Christian wife.
- Every husband needs to know them because God has asked them of his wife and she must render Him obedience in these areas.
- His loving leadership should promote and support her obedience to Christ – and so it is inconceivable to Paul that a Christian husband

who loves his wife would put her in a place were following and supporting him would involve disobedience to Christ.

- So ... what are those boundaries and constraints?

A. *In your own households* – to your *own* husband (Eph 5:22)

B. *As to the Lord* – this is your obedience to the Lord. Therefore, you can't obey a command that violates instruction from the Lord. (Eph 5:22).

C. *As the Church follows Christ* (5:24) – the church is never to violate something God expressly commanded or prohibited in the name of serving or following Christ. Nor can a wife in her relationship to her own husband. *She must follow Christ and not her husband when:*

1. following her husband violates a clear command of Scripture
2. following her husband clearly compromises her relationship to Christ or violates her conscience by supporting or engaging in sinful behavior.
3. following her husband causes her to violate Paul's clear command to love and care for the children God has given her.
4. following her husband facilitates his sin or that of others.

D. *So that the Word of God might not be reviled (Titus 2:5)*

- They were to render responsive and responsive followership and they were to graciously reprove and refrain from sinful behaviors even when asked by their husbands –
- so that the word of God (the gospel) at Crete or Ephesus would not be reviled or blasphemed by unbelievers.

Conclusion:

God has given good and gracious wisdom for Christian women that will serve them well and accomplish His purposes in their marriages.

This wisdom, while very clear, is certainly not easy. Nor will the instruction that God has for Christian husbands.

So **as a church** and as **individual fellow believers**, let's commit to do three things for our Christian sisters this morning –

1. Let's make sure our understanding of this wisdom is clear and accurate – it may be different from what many of us have heard taught in the past.
2. Let's support and encourage our sisters in Christ who are Christian Wives.
3. Let's pray fervently and faithfully for the Christian wives in our assembly.

Let's pray that:

- God would enable her and abundantly bless her in her efforts.
- her husband would lovingly treasure her and lead her well.
- that he would gratefully acknowledge the benefits he has received from her as from the Lord.
- her children would honor and exalt her and her household would render thanks to God for the immense blessing they have received from Him through her.
- her friends and neighbors would be encouraged and exhorted by her example to render similar service for Christ to their own husbands.
- the un-submissive cosmic forces would be shamed by her devotion to Christ displayed by her submission in her marriage.
- God Himself would highly honor and exalt her and grant His glorious approval of her both in this life and in the life to come.