

## Opening Words

When Paul says, “wives subject yourselves to your own husbands,” he is doing this within a biblical framework where women were equal to men, where women were one with the men in Christ, where women were redeemed and loved by God just as men were redeemed and loved by God, and where women looked forward to an eternity of joy and reigning with Christ, just as men look forward to it.

## 183 Eph The Faith in the Family 2 – Wives

What a start we had in our previous broadcast, and I hope you heard the introductory message on this revolutionary passage in Ephesians beginning with verse 22 and going to 6:9. When I say “revolutionary,” I am not just being rhetorical. I really mean this. When God’s people understand the biblical framework behind this passage of Scripture and put it into practice, great things happen – lives change, families change, entire cultures change, and even nations change. Authorities cease to be oppressive and learn that they are responsible to care for the ones they serve. Those under authority cease to have a rebellious spirit and bring honor to others. True freedom abounds and people are liberated to use their God-given creativity for the benefit of all.

In our previous broadcast, we learned that Paul takes the revolutionary step to address those under authority before he addresses those with authority. This was unprecedented and that fact alone moved human rights forward by miles. Those under human, male authority are not just property or possessions. They are people, they are valuable. They have dignity. They have worth, and as we will see, they have equality before God.

And so, when I read the section today about wives submitting to husbands, keep those truths in mind, keep the framework in mind, and remember that after Paul speaks to wives, he will have some strong words for husbands. Our text today is Ephesians 5:22-24 and it says:

<sup>22</sup> Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. <sup>24</sup> But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

The first truth that we should look at closely is the meaning of the word subject. The Greek word is a military word that means to order oneself under. Think of an army seeking to conquer an enemy and the commanding officers ordering the position and duties of the various units in such a way guaranteeing their best chance for success in battle. That’s the idea here. Paul does not have a crushing tyrannical view in place where a husband totally controls his wife, smothers her creativity, or crushes her spirit. He has the picture of an orderly relationship so that the goals of the household can be accomplished. A good commanding officer will value and nurture those under his authority because in the heat of battle he will want the soldiers to use their abilities with great creativity. In this way, wives are to order themselves under their husbands.

Second, notice that it says, “be subject to your own husbands.” Wives, the grass is not greener on the other side. Sometimes, women can fantasize. Their knight in shining armor came along, but the knight inside that suit of armor turned out to be not so glamorous and chivalrous, and the armor got a little rusty and creaky. It can be easy to look around and see other men who appear to be further along spiritually and you can think, “if only I were married to him. What a good wife I would be. I would be the most submitted, loyal wife in the world” – mmmm – probably not. Wives, be subject to **your** husband – warts and all. I have news for you, every husband has some warts, so to speak. Give my wife Kathy a call and she’ll tell you some stories about me. On second thought, don’t call her. Please don’t! But I think you get the idea. And even if your husband is not that far along spiritually or has some major issues, your spirit of humility and service and obedience will be used by God to make changes in him. You focus on changing yourself. You focus on doing what Christ tells you and pray for God to work on him.

I think it is important, also, at this point to realize, that what Paul is telling wives is not culturally conditioned. Paul is not telling wives to submit to their husbands just because that was the culture of the time and now that the culture has changed you don’t have to do what it says. Keep in mind that cultural change is not always godly change. Keep in mind that just because something is modern does not mean that it is better. Sometimes older things are better. Ever hear anyone, talking about an appliance, say, “They don’t make them like they used to.” Well, the same can be true of cultural things – newer cultural ideas aren’t necessarily better. They might be, but not necessarily and we have to hold them up to the light of Scripture.

In 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 11:2-14 Paul grounds the submission of wives to husbands in creation, not culture. He does not say, submit because that is the prevailing culture and you need to be a good testimony within this culture. Nor does he say, submit because of the fall of mankind and this is the sin we must live with until Christ returns. No, Paul bases his words in the good creation of God. He shows in these passages that woman was made after man, out of man, and for man. This is how God set it up in creation. And while sin has distorted this relationship, the grace of Christ has come to bring it back to what it was so that there can be a great measure of marital harmony in the home until Christ returns and sets up his new order of things.

Keep in mind also, that “ordering yourself under” does not mean that you are not valuable, not of equal worth, and that you are to live in a slavish cowering way before your husband. Wives are of equal value to husbands. Women are made in the image of God just as men are made in the image of God. Remember the passage from Genesis 1? Listen to verses 26-28:

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” <sup>27</sup> God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. <sup>28</sup> God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

I love this passage. Male **and female** he created them. God said to **them** “rule over the earth.” God blessed **them**. God told **them** to subdue the earth. There is to be a **joint mission** utilizing all the skills of the man and the woman to accomplish the goals that God has for the family.

I hope you are beginning to see how revolutionary these words were in the ancient world. I’ve told you before that my wife and I have been reading a book about the plight of women and children in the world. It is shocking. It is not shocking because women have a different role. It is shocking because of the sin of men oppressing women.

I want you to listen to some shocking words:

First, here is an Arab proverb: “A man loves first his son, then his camel, and then his wife.” Oh really, how would you like to be listed after a camel? How degrading!

Here is a verse from the Veda scriptures of India, “The birth of a girl, grant elsewhere. Here, grant a boy.” This saying has permeated cultures in Asia so that tens of millions of girls have been aborted simply because ultrasound has shown them to be girls. It’s a holocaust against women in the world because of these kinds of attitudes, but thankfully, some Christians with the biblical worldview are turning this around in some places.

Here is a Nigerian proverb: “A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat them, the better they be.” How would you like to live in that culture where the physical abuse of women is legitimized?

Here’s something from Buddhism: “She is born a woman because she committed a thousand sins in the previous world.” I’m sure you recognize the belief of reincarnation in this saying. You know, in Western culture, we are experiencing a love affair with Buddhism. So many people think it is so cool and so spiritual and so holy and that it may be the way to immortality. What would happen if this saying were printed on the cover of every Buddhist book as a warning, sort of like the Surgeon General’s warnings about cancer on a pack of cigarettes. Maybe that would cool our culture’s love affair with Buddhism.

Here’s one from Confucianism, “It is the law of nature that women should not be allowed any will of their own.” How’s that for fulfillment!

Every day an orthodox Jew, in the morning, prays, “Lord I thank you I was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.”

And one more, from the Qur’an, “Men are superior to women because of the qualities with which God has gifted the one above the other.”

Are you beginning to see why I say that this passage in Paul, and the one in Genesis are revolutionary and did more for the cause of women in the world than anything else?

And so when Paul says, “wives subject yourselves to your own husbands,” he is doing this within a biblical framework where women were equal to men, where women were one with the men in Christ, where women were just as much in the image of God as men, where women received

spiritual gifts just as men received spiritual gifts, where women were redeemed and loved by God just as men were redeemed and loved by God, and where women looked forward to an eternity of joy and reigning with Christ, just as men look forward to this.

Yes, Paul did say, “wives, submit to your own husbands,” but he said to do this as if you are submitting directly to Christ and that you are a picture of the Church submitting to Christ. And just as the church has a glorious future ahead of it, so the wife has a glorious future ahead of her.