

The Glory of Submission – Prov 12:4

The Glorious Mystery that is Marriage X

Introduction – There are many passages that explicitly command a wife to be submissive to her own husband and there are many sermons that could be preached on the godly demeanor and role of a wife. We will only address one in this series directly, but it should be noticed that the whole series should be studied in light of both of the roles of husband and wife.

First, to the Husbands - you are always responsible for the state of your marriage, for the obedience or disobedience of your wife, for her graciousness to you and to the world around her. This means that in a certain way, *your wife does not have any problems*. At least none that you will not be required to give an account.

Second, to the Wives – this in no way decreases your responsibility before God as a private person for your actions, your attitudes, your words, and your responsiveness to your husband. As far as it goes for you, *your sins are your sins*. The husband is responsible, but this does not rule out the fact that you may be at fault.

The Glory and Power of a Godly Wife – “*An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, But she who causes shame is like rottenness in his bones*” (Prov 12:4). As we have seen, the relationship of husband and wife is the quintessential picture of Christ and the church. Christ bestows glory and His bride reflects that glory which He wears as His crown. The excellent wife reflects this, she submits to her own husband as to the Lord, and this is a great mystery (Eph 5:22, 32).

A Submissive Wife Submits to the Word – It is impossible to be this kind of crown without having a heart which has submitted to the Word of God. A wife cannot obey Eph 5:22-24 without first obeying 5:18-21. She cannot live out Eph 4-6 without first believing Eph 1-3. She cannot “*walk worthy of the calling*” (Eph 4:1) unless she believes “*you were called*” (Eph 4:1). Do not measure yourself by your own standards and do not ask your husband. Let the Word be your mirror to reveal to you who you are (Deut 8:3, James 1:23), but let that Word drive you to always look away to Christ for your justification and sanctification.

A Submissive Wife is Subject to Her Husband – Our egalitarian culture tries so hard to get out from under the commands of Eph 5:22-24. Ironically, “*subject*” in the Greek means “To place *under*.” Her subjection is to be like that of the church to Christ and the church learns this subjection by imitating Christ (Phil 2:5-8). This kind of submission is not something that is measured until you find yourself differing with your husband, and it is very good to notice this in little day-to-day activities and decisions (“*...in everything*”). Husbands also imitate Christ, submitting to His Law, providing a relationship where their wives are their best advisor, co-heir with the King, and sister and friend in the Lord.

A Submissive Wife Respects Her Husband – Eph 5:33 calls wives to ‘fear’ or ‘reverence’ their husbands. This is more than simply not being disrespectful. There must be a positive display of admiration, honor, and reverence to and about the husband (“*Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons*” – Songs 2:3). Wives are not to begin respecting their husbands because they are respectable; there is no authority residing in the husband that requires a wife to respect him. That authority is a conferred, delegated authority. Therefore, respecting husbands (like loving wives) is simply an act of respecting and obeying God.

A Submissive Wife Transforms Her Husband – There is a way to change him, but it is not the way you expect or naturally think. This is the counter-intuitive way of the cross applied to wives. You are called to imitate Sarah (1 Pet 3:5-6). When this fear accompanies chaste behavior, God uses it as a means to sanctify husbands (1 Pet 3:1-2). Fair warning: This is not a method given with promises for wives who are simply self-seeking. It is given to followers of Christ who long to see Him glorified in everything and who long to magnify the glory of their husbands.

A Submissive Wife Responds to Her Husband – Songs 2:3 continues “*I sat down in his shade with great delight*” and goes on to describe the intimate love of husband and wife. Reverence is connected to sexual responsiveness, and so the lack of the former often affects the latter. But she is to gladly receive his advances, both as a holy blessing (Heb 13:4), and as a protection for her husband (1 Cor 7:3-4). “*I am my beloved’s and his desire is toward me*” (Songs 7:10).

The Glory of Trinitarian Submission – When Christ submitted to the Father, He in no way became the Father’s doormat. Biblical submission transforms others. Biblical submission moves to exaltation and glory. Biblical submission follows the pattern of death and resurrection and so declares the gospel when aligned with biblical headship. “*This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church*” (Eph 5:32) and so, of course the unbelieving culture around us cannot understand it.

The Dance of Trinitarian Submission – The head needs glory to rest on it in order to be crowned, and a crown needs a head to show forth its glory. But let us change the metaphor. In a Unitarian world, authority and submission is a fist fight with a winner and a loser, someone on top and someone beat down. In a Trinitarian world, authority and submission are a lovely dance. No gentleman bows to a lady after a dance and declares himself “the winner.” At the same time, his authority is in no way demeaning to her. He leads in the dance and the better he leads, the more he showcases his lady. She follows his lead and his glory is revealed, all eyes fall on her and them, for he is dancing with his glory.