

Gospel shaped Wives

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[0 : 00] All right, good morning. If you're visiting today, then you won't know this, but we're actually doing a series on gospel-shaped family.

We've had one talk by David. He started the series off with a talk on relationships and how we are actually wired by God for relationship. Just as we have an eternally relation God in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we're actually wired to relate to one another.

We're created in his image. Then last week we looked at gospel-shaped husbands, what it means to be a husband in God's world. And this week we're going to look at gospel-shaped wives.

And perhaps that seems a bit counterintuitive seeing as it's Father's Day, but I suspect that there's something, I know that there's something in this for both husbands and wives that will enrich the experience of what it means to be a husband, a wife, a father, a mother.

Okay, so if you have your Bibles, I'd encourage you to stay, keep them open to Ephesians chapter 5. And that's where we'll be landing.

[1 : 14] All righty. Even as we start, something I want to say to you right up front is this, that when we start talking about commands like we just heard read and like we just heard explained to the children, some of us will actually be starting to think concerned thoughts, submission, respect.

One person is the boss. The other person is not. And we'll start to wonder what that actually looks like. And I want to share with you right from the very start that Paul actually takes this issue of fear on right up front.

But we need to actually get a sense of why that, you know, the fact that that fear is even there. You see, from a woman's perspective, the world looks very different to the perspective that men quite often assume.

So, for example, I've got friends, female friends, who would say things like this to me. When we go out for a meal, we all meet in a restaurant and go out for a meal, and then everyone walks back to their car at 10, 30, 11 o'clock at night, I find that really frightening, particularly single women who obviously they don't have a husband with them.

They find that really frightening. And I've got to say, when my friend told me this, I thought, I have never even considered being afraid walking back to my car at night. And then she went on to say, and it doesn't just end there.

[2 : 42] You see, when I go home and the house is empty, when I turn that key, I have a fear in my heart about going into that house for the first time. Once I'm in there and the lights are on and I'm moving around and everything's okay, I'm fine.

But that first initial, putting the key in the lock to turn it and to go into the house, there's just that moment of fear in her heart. I don't have that fear.

So friends, what I want to say to you is this. This perspective on the world, it's not everyone for every circumstance, but this perspective on the world that is the way that women see the world may not be the way that you men see the world.

It may not be entirely the same. You may be walking into scenarios and contexts, even on the way over here we were talking about dating and what it's like when you first ask a girl out for a date.

And Jo was sharing a story about how she was first asked out on a date or first asked to go to the pub. And she thought it was just as friends. And she turned up and they had a nice time and they had a drink and everything.

[3 : 50] And then as they walked out, the guy put his arm around her. The mongrel. It wasn't me. But you know what I mean? She was like, whoa, what's going on here? I didn't sign up for this.

There's a way that women see the world that is very different to the way that men see the world. We need to understand that as we approach this. Paul did. He knows that fear is a problem and he frames this passage with the issue of fear.

Think about this too, because in this context that Paul's writing into, husbands literally had the power of life and death over their wives. So he has to take this issue on. This passage actually begins in verse 21.

And we know this because the topic of submission is a heading. If you read verse 21, it says, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. So here's the heading of submission.

But the other reason we know that this is actually a part of this section is this. The verb submit isn't even in verse 22. So to read it as it would be in the, as the Greek would have it, it would be submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, wives to your husbands as to the Lord.

[5 : 04] So verse 22 requires on verse 21 for the verb submit. And this verb submission is actually then tied to the subject of reverence.

It's the same word used to finish the instructions to wives if we go right down to verse 33. Although in verse 33, the word is translated respect.

In verse 21, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. And verse 33, wives respect your husbands. Reverence and respect are translations of the same Greek word for fear.

The passage is framed by the commands to fear. And in Greek thought, before we get too concerned about this, in Greek thought, the word fear had two main poles.

Fear, as in the running away from something kind of fear. And the fear, which is the running towards something kind of fear. So the running away from something kind of fear is the fear that's associated with feeling unsafe.

[6 : 18] You'll know this. It's a negative experience that's meant to keep you alive. But brought into relationships, it damages relationships. It damages intimacy.

The fear, the running towards something kind of fear, on the other hand, is associated with words like awe, reverence, respect. There's strength there, but it's a strength that you want to run toward for safety.

It's a positive experience that deepens intimacy. Paul is wanting us to understand our roles as husbands and wives, to be able to set the tone of our marriage, our family dynamic.

And that tone here is the fear, the safety kind of fear. So let's keep that in mind as we look at how the wife is instructed to behave. So the command in verse 22.

Paul begins his heavenly description of marriage with a command to wives. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. Submit to your husbands.

[7 : 26] Our definition of submission would be helpful at this point. And I'll give you this, is my suggested one. To entrust yourself into someone's care. So submission is to entrust yourself into someone's care.

You could say it's to place yourself under someone's authority, but we know from this passage that there's more to it than that. It's not just about authority. It's about entrusting yourself to your husband's care.

Now, can I say as well that even as we talk about the words authority and submission, submission, these words actually require comprehension.

And I suspect that submission doesn't mean what you'd like to, well, what you think it means. If we go back to the very beginning of the story of humanity and the creation story, the role of woman was pivotal in that story.

The woman was to rule creation with the man in chapter 1, verse 28. She was to rule the family with the man. They were meant to be co-regents of all of creation.

[8 : 35] The woman was to be the helper in chapter 2, without which the man could not be all he was intended to be. Wives, you did not surrender your brains at the end of the aisle when you got married.

You do not receive a lobotomy when you get married. When you do marriage preparation with David and I, that is not a part of the process.

Wives, you need to be all that you are for God's design to truly shine. Now, I think some of you hear that.

Yeah, fine, okay. But what I want to raise here is this issue of that's not how it works out. Me, two people trying to be all that they are in one space tends to lead to disagreements that lead to conflict, that break out into arguments.

Can I just say, that's us doing two becoming one badly. That is not what God intended it to look like. That's just us doing it badly. Conflict is us doing it badly.

[9 : 53] And so often when we do it badly, that bad experience drives the woman to silence. Men have a certain presence. And when they project that presence, they can become the kind of person that silences their wives without even realizing it.

But when we silence our wives like that, we're producing in them the running away kind of fear and not the running toward kind of fear.

Handled well, disagreements, well, they actually have the power to enrich our decisions, our relationships. I've shared with you before that in my relationship with Joe, we had very different backgrounds in terms of how to approach the disciplining of your kids.

And so we had very different expectations of what that would look like when we started to have our own children. And we would have discussions. Discussions that at times got loud.

But those discussions actually shaped our thinking because they drove us to reconsider why we wanted to do things the way that we wanted to do them.

[11 : 05] They drove us back to the Bible and to consider what God actually wanted us to be living like. And I'm not going to tell you, all of my kids are here today, so you can ask them over morning tea.

I'm not going to pretend that I was perfect in this. But the agreement that we got to as husband and wife through that disagreement was far better than either of us would have come up with on our own.

Handled well, disagreements have the power to enrich your decisions, to enrich your relationships. Adam recognised in Eve this new parameter that came into his life that just blew things out of all of his prior expectations.

He recognised it. In Genesis 2, verse 23, when he said, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. He wasn't saying, oh, nice, something to keep me warm at night.

He was seeing the fullness of existence for the first time. Life without Eve was empty, lonely, limited, or in God's words, not good.

[12 : 16] But with Eve, life was filled with a potential, a potential he couldn't even have imagined. And it was very good. Where very, in the Hebrew actually, it means exceedingly good.

No more space for good. As in, there is no better kind of good. And she was given in to his care. And she was to entrust herself to his care.

To submit to him. To respect him. Simple, right? Well, sadly, history is littered with, well, multitude of examples of how to get this wrong.

So it's a challenging thing. Even knowing all these truths, it's a challenging thing to talk about. To fully understand how submission works, we need to be clear on two key points.

First one is this. Submission is a voluntary attitude of the heart. It's a voluntary attitude of cooperating, respecting, following the lead of your husband.

[13 : 20] Submission comes from the heart. That's important. Why? Because it means that submission cannot be forced.

It cannot be coerced. It cannot be legislated by rules. We have a word for that. It's called slavery. Wives, or those who one day may be, there may be, submission is choosing to entrust yourself to your husband's care.

This is a hard thing to do. Now, one of the reasons why is explained in the fall. And as wives, you may be tempted to be thinking, yeah, my husband's an idiot, you know.

But that's not the reason that you should be paying attention to in the fall. See, when Adam and Eve rebelled against God, the woman had a role in that. And the role of the woman in the fall will actually help you to understand your struggle with submission.

See, in Genesis chapter, we can find out what was going on in Eve's mind in Genesis chapter 3, verse 6. We read these words.

[14 : 32] When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

And she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Creation was very good. Remember that abundant kind of good.

It could not be better kind of good. But she believed the lie that there was more to be had. She began to want more.

She took the lead. She ate. And God spelled out the consequence of this in his judgment to the woman in chapter 3, verse 16 of Genesis. He said, Second point.

Submission is a specific act of worship. I say specific because in this context, the wife's submitting to the husband, it's a specific act that the woman alone can do.

[16 : 04] And right up front, we learn two things about the motivation behind submission. Firstly, in verse 21, that submission is motivated or born of our reverence for Christ. We read out of reverence for Christ as the reason.

And then secondly, in verse 22, the very next verse, submission is primarily directed to the Lord. Submit to your husbands as to the Lord. And if that's the case, it should be no surprise to us that the command to submit is both unconditional and limitless.

Unconditional, I say, in the sense that it's not dependent on how well the husband is doing at his job of loving you. Limitless, in that we read in verse 24, that wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

In everything, does that mean that every single whim that he happens to enter his mind? No, it's talking about the wife submitting in everything.

It's saying the wife is submitting all of her life into his hands. Entrusting the whole of your life, the whole of yourself, every facet of it, to his care.

[17 : 17] But it's more than that when we consider this issue of worship. You see, marriage is not about you.

Marriage, I'm going to say that again, marriage is not primarily about you. It's about Christ and the church. Whatever your hopes and dreams about marriage are, and it seems that we've managed to pack all kinds of hopes and dreams into the institution of marriage, whatever those hopes and dreams are, if they don't find their hope and fulfilment in Christ's plans for the church, well, then they're fragile and temporary, and they will let you down.

But when we turn our marriages over to pointing to the eternal union between Christ and the church, that's worship. Okay, so this is a command.

Now we're going to look at the purpose behind this command, what's going on here. Paul goes on to explain why understanding what marriage is about is so important in verse 23.

See, in verse 23, he says this, For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its saviour.

[18 : 38] The husband is the head of the wife. The head. The translation for that, again, is ruler or authority. Authority figure. People have tried to mess with what that word means, to get a different definition maybe that's easier to live with in the 21st century.

But that's what it means. Ruler. Authority. Having said that, we can unpack that a little bit more to get a sense of how it's actually enacted, how it's actually expressed.

You see, this isn't the first time the word head is actually used in Ephesians. It's used two other times, both to describe Christ's relationship to the church. In chapter 1, verse 22, where all power is placed under Christ's feet as he becomes the head of the church, what we're discovering there is Christ is in control over any and every other authority.

Now, I know that has a cutting edge, doesn't it? Because that means that if he controls everything, anything that can threaten you, as well as anything that can promote your good, then that means that in his wisdom, he's not promoting all the good that you want, but he's also allowing for things that you really don't want to experience.

But think about this. That one being who had authority over everything, and has authority over everything, allowed men whose lives he was sustaining by the power of his will, to spit in his face.

[20 : 14] He allowed men whose desire was to nail him to a cross, to complete that action. He allowed every atom in those nails of iron to stay in existence when he could have just dismissed them with a thought.

That's Christ. Power, under control, exercised for the benefit of his church. And in 4.15, that's the other passage where headship is mentioned, Christ is described as the head of the church, a church that he nourishes and grows, as each person reaches their full potential in him.

So, headship is a position of strength, where the husband is protecting and nurturing his wife, and submission is entrusting, the wife entrusting herself into the care of her husband.

Wives, your husband is to be your safe place. That's God's design. He is your closest ally in everything.

But man, how do you do that? How do you manage to respect wives? How do you manage to respect and submit to your husband when he is so obviously not perfect?

[21 : 37] He's not managing to love you. Not unconditionally, all the time. He disengages from you. He abuses his presence, his strength.

At times, he will frighten you. The one that he's supposed to be protecting. How can you respect a man like that? How can you trust him? How can you place your life in his hands?

Well, if we're just looking horizontally, husband to wife, then we can come up with all kinds of issues about how this works. But Paul doesn't leave it there for us.

He explains the way in this verse, verse 23. It's in the second part of it. You see, he says, For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, which is his body, and he himself is its saviour.

How do you do it? Well, the short answer is this. Your husband is not your saviour. Christ is your saviour. This is important. This is foundational to marriage.

[22 : 48] It's important because your husband is not perfect. I can guarantee that. If you're not yet married, there is no perfect option. Don't be waiting around for it. If you are waiting for him, then good luck. But if you try to make your husband your saviour, he will fail you.

Now, here's a challenge. See, God has wired women to complement a man in their life. Now, we'll look at this issue of singleness later, the beautiful gift of singleness that God has given to his church.

But this is still a general rule, that God has wired women to complement a man in their life. And women, therefore, want someone whose strength is able to complete that, whose strength is unlimited, whose commitment to them is unwavering, whose disposition toward them is to love them with every fibre of their being.

That's what women want. But can I say this to you? Women, that's not you. No matter how far feminism progresses in our society, you will not be that person for yourself.

And before the husbands start puffing up too much, let me say this. It's not you either, husbands. It may be what you aspire to be as a husband, but it's not you.

[24 : 12] It's Christ, only Christ. Any other saviour will fail you. And if all your hope is in them, it will devastate you.

But if Christ is your saviour, then he is your ultimate safe place. He is watching over you with unlimited strength, unwavering commitment, steadfast and sacrificial love.

He provides you with forgiveness in the gospel. He provides a model for you to forgive your husbands. Look horizontally and you would just walk away.

Look to Christ and your own experience of the gospel in him. Wow. You'll find this. The experience of forgiveness, the strength to forgive, and the means to restore your husbands.

To respect. It's interesting at this point to note that Paul starts the family rules by instructing the wives. Why is that?

[25 : 20] I mean, certainly in Roman times, there was a very solid understanding of what the head of the house, what his role was. So everything else is fitted in a round relating to that head of the house.

Why does Paul start with wives? Well, Joel pointed out something that I hadn't really noticed before in our small group this week. And it's a compelling reason to explain this because it actually puts Christ at centre stage.

He suggested that the role of the wife is something that husbands and wives both have in common. We all know what it means to be the unfaithful wife.

We all need Christ's unfailing love, his forgiveness. We all know what it means to entrust our lives into his care. That's a beautiful thing, isn't it, to have as a foundation of a marriage.

A marriage that you know is going to be flawed. A marriage that may well be carrying flaws even now. So I want to leave you with this challenge. Wives, do you submit to your husband? Do you entrust yourself to his care?

[26 : 26] Are there barriers that are holding you back? If there are, I would urge you and encourage you to talk to your husband about the things that have built up between you.

Confess your sin to each other and to God. Forgive. Restore. And husbands, a challenge for you. Do your wives fear you?

Do they fear you in the right kind of way? Are you the running toward kind of fear in their life that they need? Or are you promoting the wrong kind of fear?

Ask your wives. What areas of your character, what areas of your contribution as a husband promote your wife, promoting your wife the fear that makes them want to run away from you?

And if there's sin to own there, repent. If there's a sensitivity that you discover in your wife, resolve to gentleness in that area as you relate to her.

[27 : 36] And do this all for all of us out of reverence for Christ. Let me pray. Let me pray. Father God, we are so grateful to you for the love that we've experienced through your son.

We are the unfaithful wife. We are the ones who need your unfailing love, your forgiveness, your strength, exercised in a way that actually lifts us up out of the muck and the mire that we've gotten ourselves into.

And we thank you so much for doing that. Lord, we pray that it wouldn't just be a gratitude that stays in our own hearts toward you, but it's that it's a gratitude that spills out into how we relate to each other.

That we would love each other the way that you've loved us. That we would forgive each other with the same heart of forgiveness that you have toward us. That wives would be reverent toward their husbands in the way that you've called us to be reverent toward you.

That husbands would be sacrificially loving toward their wives, again, as you've taught us to be. And we pray these things in Jesus' name.

[28 : 56] Amen.