

THE BIBLICAL FAMILY

WEEK 4: HOW DO HUSBANDS AND WIVES FUNCTION IN THE FAMILY?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- In this 6-week series we are going to discuss the Biblical family. This is going to be an overview of what the Bible says about some key topics, roles and patterns that should be in every family.
- Week 1: What is a Biblical family?
- Week 2: What priorities do parents, husbands & wives, have in their family?
- Week 3: How do husbands and wives' function in the family? Part I
- **Week 4: How do husbands and wives' function in the family? Part II**
- Week 5: How can conflicts be handled and resolved Biblically? Part I
- Week 6: How can conflicts be handled and resolved Biblically? Part II
- The overall goal of this class is to give theological understanding and practical wisdom on the purpose of the family and how God desires to use the family for His glory and for our good.

INTRODUCTION

- Last week we discussed roles in the family and started by defining what they are in the world and then what the Bible says. We talked about wives and mothers and what the Bible says to them.
- Today, we are going to finish our discussion about wives and mothers and then move on to discuss the role of the man, both as a husband and a father.
- We are also going to talk about children and the role they play in the family.

BIBLICAL ROLES (CON'T)

- Paul outlines three main verses for wives in **Ephesians 5:22-24** “**Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 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. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.**”
- The idea of being submissive *is not regulated to wives only*.
- **Ephesians 5:21** “...and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”

- Notice that this verse comes right before **verse 22** that we just read. **Verse 21** is actually the capstone for what Paul was previously teaching on in **Ephesians 5**.
- When you go back to the start of this section, it is **verse 18** **“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.”**
- Paul is linking our subjection to one another with being filled with the Spirit.
- “In other words, *submission* is the single principle that sums up the character of a truly Spirit-filled person. It is the key and capstone of the Spirit’s work in our hearts.”¹
- The life of the believer in general should be characterized by submissiveness. **Philippians 2:3-4** **“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”**
- We are to be like Christ in how we treat and view one another.
- But we should not misuse or misunderstand what the principle is and how it is taught. God has placed a structure in place for the family and for the church.
- Notice the qualifications for a wife to be submissive. This is not a general call to all women in all places.
- She is to be submissive to **her own husband...not to all husbands or men**.
 - This means men are not automatically elevated to higher status than women, that is unbiblical.
 - In other words, the family itself is the primary arena in which a godly woman is to cultivate and demonstrate the attitude of humility, service, and sacrifice called for in **verse 21**.²
- It is also a command to all wives, not just those who have “good” husbands.
 - The command is to **all** wives of all husbands. She is not to wait until he is a man that she deems as being good enough to submit to.
- We talked about this in the first class, but it needs to be repeated.
- “Notice also that the word submit is not the word obey. **What it calls for is an active, deliberate, loving, intelligent devotion to the husband’s noble aspirations and ambitions. It does not demand blind, fawning, slavish kowtowing to his every whim.** The Greek word for “obey” would be *hupakouo*, and that is what Paul demanded of children in 6:1 and slaves in 6:5. **But a wife is neither a child nor a slave,** waiting on her husband while he sits in an easy chair and issues commands (“Hand me the remote!” “Get me something to drink!” “Fix me a snack!” “Fetch my slippers!” “Go to the store for me, will ya?”). **Marriage is a much more personal and intimate relationship than that. It’s a union, a partnership, a singular mutual devotion, and that truth is emphasized by the words “your own husband.”**³

¹ John MacArthur, *The Fulfilled Family*, 7

² Ibid. p. 31.

³ Ibid. p. 32.

The role of mother⁴

- The apostle Paul taught that one of the primary roles of women is that of “childbearing,” that is, not only the act of giving birth **but their domestic role related to the upbringing of children and managing of the home** (1 Tim. 2:15; cf. 5:14).
- Thus, motherhood is not disparaged in biblical teaching; contrary to many in modern society, it is held up as the woman’s privilege.
- This exposes the unbiblical nature of a feminism that promotes gender equality understood as sameness and encourages women to forsake their calling in the home **for the sake of finding self-fulfillment in a career outside the home.**
 - Realize what the author is saying, he is not saying *women don’t have a job*, rather, are you content with the role that God has given you in your own home.
 - If you can take care of the home as God has commanded and have a job outside the home, then by all means, do so. There is nothing which would prohibit a woman from working.
 - Paul is talking about matters of the heart...the motivation behind the decisions we make.
- In fact, 1 Timothy 2:15 speaks a powerful message to our culture “where many are seeking to ‘liberate’ women from all encumbrances of family responsibilities in order to unleash them on a quest for self-fulfillment apart from such functions.” To the contrary, **“it is precisely by participating in her role pertaining to the family that women fulfill their central calling.”**
- This is not a matter of seeking to restrict women to the home, but of determining the essence of women’s calling from God and of encouraging them to live it out.
- This will result not only in greater blessing and fulfillment for women themselves but also for their husbands and families, and it will bring honor to the God who created us male and female.

THE ROLE OF THE HUSBAND

- “Headship” in Scripture never means raw authority. **Instead, the biblical idea of headship puts the stress on sacrifice and service.** The truly Christlike head will protect, provide for, and even die for those under his headship. “Head” is not a position of superiority; it’s a loving, nurturing relationship, best epitomized by Christ when He took the servant’s role to wash His own disciples’ feet.⁵
- When speaking of marriages, it is vital to remember that our marriages are a picture of the gospel and how Christ and the church are related to each other.

⁴ D. Jones and A. Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 109.

⁵ John MacArthur, *The Fulfilled Family*, 52–54.

- As wives are to be submissive to their husbands, the church is to be submissive to their Lord. As Christ loves the church, so husbands are to love their wives. **Both husbands and wives' roles in their marriage are not predicated upon their spouse but upon Christ and His relationship with the church.**
- “Remember, Paul’s theme in **Ephesians 5** (from **verse 21** on) is mutual submission. When he introduced the husband’s headship in **verse 23**, he was not changing the subject. He was not saying everyone else needs to submit to the man, who as the head of the family gets to impose his will and his desires on everyone else. Not at all. **Paul’s whole point here was that a husband best shows Christlike headship by voluntary, loving sacrifice and service on behalf of the wife**—which is as much a form of submission as the wife’s allegiance to her husband’s leadership and the children’s obedience to their parents.”⁶
- There is nothing in Scripture that puts the husband over the wife in such a way that she is to remain silent and simply do what he dictates.
- It is because of sin that this happens. Man’s sinful tendency is to dominate by brute force. This is not just in the world’s house but also in the Christian family.
- Men should not be heavy-handed with their authority, nor should they be lazy meting out judgment when it is appropriate. **There is no lord-servant relationship between a husband and wife.**
- The husband is the head of the household, but the wife is an equal partner. The head does not mean that he is the ruling sovereign. It means that when decisions must be made, he is the one who must make the final decision.
- **Any husband with any sense at all will have no issues allowing his wife to have input in making decisions.**
- **Genesis 2:18 “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’”**
 - The word for *helper* also means *assistance*. God has made the woman, the wife, to be a helper and/or one who assists her husband.
 - The same word for *help* is used all throughout the OT when speaking of God and His relationship with Israel.
 - **Hosea 13:9 “It is your destruction, O Israel, that you are against Me, against your help.”**
 - This is obviously speaking of Israel and their continual rejection of God and what He was desiring to do in and through them.
 - But I think that it is a very helpful illustration for us in our marriage. **If the man is against the help that the Lord God has given him, it is going to be for his destruction.**

⁶ Ibid. pp. 56–57.

- If the husband does not desire and use his wife's assistance, he is literally rejecting the very grace that the Lord has given him to help him lead and guide the family.

The Husband is to Love His Wife

- Ephesians 5:25 “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...”
 - The verb used for *love* is in the imperative. This means that it is a command to the husbands that they are to follow. **If they are not, then it is sinful.**
 - Notice to whom the command is given, husbands, and the way they are to love their wives, just as Christ loved the church.
- The husband is to operate and lead the family from this command to love. I think that it is very important that there are no commands for the husband to *lead* his wife or family...but he is commanded to *love* his wife and family.
- “Authentic love is incompatible with a despotic or domineering approach to headship. **When Paul commanded husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, he was in effect forbidding them to exercise severe or abusive authority over their wives.** If the model of this love is Christ, who “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (**Matt. 20:28**), **then the husband who thinks he exists so his wife and children can serve him couldn't be farther off the mark.**”⁷
- Since husbands are commanded to love, this means a few different things.
- **Firstly**, it is not something that is going to come naturally to him. It is something that he is going to have to work on and be very deliberate about.
 - Our sinful tendencies (both man and woman) will almost certainly bring us to thinking about ourselves first and foremost.
 - 1 Corinthians 6:11 “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”
 - Romans 6:11 “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”
 - Husbands must deny the urge to put himself first and strive to be who God says that he is now.
 - As Christians, we are washed, sanctified and justified by the blood of Christ. We are now able to say no to sin and live a true life to God through Christ.
- **Secondly**, genuine love is not merely a feeling or an involuntary attraction. **It involves a willful choice**, and that is why this is in the form of an imperative. Far from being something we “fall into” by happenstance,

⁷ Ibid. p. 58.

authentic love involves a deliberate, voluntary commitment to sacrifice whatever we can for the good of the person we love.”⁸

- Once husbands know who they are in Christ and believe what the Bible says about them, they must now **act** on that knowledge.
- “...when Paul commanded husbands to love their wives, he was calling for all the virtues outlined in 1 Corinthians 13, including patience, kindness, generosity, humility, meekness, thoughtfulness, liberality, gentleness, trust, goodness, truthfulness, and long-suffering. It is significant that all the properties of love stress selflessness and sacrifice. **The husband who truly loves his wife simply cannot wield his authority over her like a club.** Far from being overlord of the family, the godly husband and father must make himself servant of all.”⁹
- Love cannot be defined by emotions or feelings as they are untrustworthy and on shaky ground.
- Imagine if Christ said that He loved us, only when we felt loved. Or if God says I will be with you always, only when you can feel my presence.
- We would be searching to “feel” the love of Christ and to “feel” the presence of God. This would be subjective to us and we would never know if what we felt was really God or something that we have imagined in our own minds.
- The Bible states what God did to show His love towards us.
- **Romans 5:8 “But God *demonstrates* His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”**
- We are not left up to our own interpretation of feelings to try and decide if God loves us. He did something that showed us how much He loves us.
- **Romans 8:32 “He who *did not spare* His own Son, but *delivered Him* over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”**
- God spared nothing to not only show you His love towards you but to also bring salvation upon sinful and helpless man.
- **This is the love that husbands must show towards their own wives.** The husband who abuses his role as the head of the household and dishonors his wife and family has corrupted not only the marriage union but also symbolism which God has set forth for marriages.
- Furthermore, when a husband does this, he is not just sinning against his wife, but he is sinning against the one who is over him, Christ.

⁸ Ibid. pp. 58–59.

⁹ Ibid. pp. 59–60.

- 1 Corinthians 11:3 “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.”
- We all have someone that we are accountable to and must realize that the position that has been given to us does not come with ultimate authority, but limited by the One who gave it.

A Father to His Children

- In **Ephesians 6:4**, Paul writes, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” The Colossian parallel reads, “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (**Col. 3:21**).
 - While children ought to obey both parents (**Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20**), fathers bear special responsibility for disciplining their children and are specifically singled out by Paul in the present passage.
 - Although mothers may actually spend more time with them, the father is given the primary responsibility for disciplining his children. The apostle’s exhortation to fathers not to exasperate (**Eph. 6:4 NIV**) their children echoes his earlier concern about anger in **Ephesians 4:26–27, 31**, while the positive injunction to bring up children in the training and admonition of the Lord recalls the earlier emphasis on learning Christian teaching in **Ephesians 4:20–21**.¹⁰
- Why is it so important that fathers are not provoking their children to anger?
- **If anger is prolonged, not being resolved but allowing to continue, this will inevitably allow Satan to gain a stronghold in the family.**
 - 2 Corinthians 2:10-11 “But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”
 - While Paul is speaking of the church here, the principle is the same for families.
 - Satan is always going to attack families, as they have been designed and ordained by God.
 - They are also a picture of the Christ and the church and a loud proclamation of the gospel message.
 - Satan would desire nothing more than to bring disgrace to families which brings dishonor to God.
 - While speaking to Christians in general, Paul says in **Ephesians 4:26-27** “Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.”
 - These verses are pretty self-explanatory. There is going to be anger in your family. There are going to be disputes of some kind. But these disputes and the anger which may come as a result need to be taken care of quickly.

¹⁰ David W. Jones and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 107
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- **As a father, you cannot provoke you children to anger and expect God’s blessings on your family.** You cannot allow unresolved anger to linger in your household. By doing this, you are allowing Satan to have a stronghold in your family and the seeds of discord to be sown.
- The fathers’ primary role is to provide for their children and to ensure proper nurture and discipline. This involves formal as well as informal education and entails the exercise of various forms of discipline, to include physical discipline (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13–14; Heb. 12:6; Rev. 3:19; cf. Sir. 3:23; 30:1–3, 12).¹¹

THE CHILDREN’S ROLE IN THE FAMILY

- “Fundamentally, children, like all people, **ought to be considered spiritual individuals who are uniquely created by God and yet are fallen sinners, so that the task of parenting is not merely that of behavioral conditioning but spiritual nurture and training.**”¹²
- Children show their submissiveness to their parents by their obedience to them. (Ex. 20:12; Prov. 1:8-9; 6:20; Col. 3:20). Almost every time the Bible speaks of children, the message is the same...Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your mother and father, which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’ (Eph. 6:1-3)
- It’s a promise of long life, blessing, and prosperity. Writing under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, Paul brought together the promise of Exodus 20:12 (“that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you”) with the fuller language of Deuteronomy 4:40: “that it may go well with you ... and that you may prolong your days [on the earth]”—so that there are two parts to the promise. On the one hand, it promises quality of life (that it may be well with you). On the other hand, it promises length of days (and you may live long).¹³
 - **This is a truism, not a guarantee.** Some people honor their parents and die young anyway. There have undoubtedly been cases where people who have despised their parents’ authority have nevertheless lived to old age. But as a general rule, the principle is true. Rebelling against parents has built-in consequences that tend to shorten one’s life.
- How does a child learn obedience? We use instructions on how to do things and examples to show it. Parents also use discipline when their child lacks obedience and then training to get them back on track.
- “The parents’ authority provides a safe environment in which children can grow in all these ways. The children’s obedience is the fuel for all their learning and growth, and the better they learn to obey, the more proficiently they will grow in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and men.”¹⁴

¹¹ David W. Jones and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family*. 108.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 113

¹³ John MacArthur, *The Fulfilled Family*, 85–86.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 96