Biblical Manhood and Womanhood in the Home, Part 1 | Week 6[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Introduction**

In the first weeks of this class we’ve spent some time considering the most sustained passages in the Bible about what it means to be male and female. Now that we have a basic framework for masculinity and femininity, we want to fill out the skeleton as it relates to the home, the church, the workplace and the world.

This morning, we begin with the home – the family. As we do so, let me say somewhat out of necessity that these next two weeks may be the most marriage-centric of the course. That’s simply because Scripture treats marriage as a common experience for *many* men and women, and so it sometimes discusses the interplay between masculinity and femininity in the home within the context of marriage.

But before we get to the family, it is essential for us to begin with the condition that all Christians begin life in, and that all Christians will be in for eternity once we die – singleness. So consider this first section something of a prologue before we begin “biblical manhood and womanhood in the home” proper. We will understand masculinity and femininity in the family better if we begin by looking, as it were, outside of the nuclear family and think about:

**I. Biblical Masculinity and Femininity in the Context of Singleness.** Two main points:

**A. The Bible Celebrates Singleness for Men and Women.**

Marriage isn’t *superior* to singleness. Unlike some religions and cultures, the New Testament extols the value of the single life! Listen to Paul in 1 Cor 7:8: “To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am.” He says later on in the chapter, “The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. **33**But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, **34**and his interests are divided.” So according to Scripture*,* singleness enables the Christian to serve God with undivided affections and devotion. It’s a gift to be embraced, not a curse to be avoided or some inferior state. You *don’t* need to be married or have children to be fully masculine or feminine – who’s our primary example for that? Jesus himself, the greatest exemplar of biblical manhood. We know from **Matthew 22:30** that in the course of eternity, there will be no giving and receiving in marriage; this worldly institution of marriage will cease, because we’ll all be married to our Lord as the bride of Christ. This season, whether we’re single or married, is ultimately to prepare us for that season. And not only that, but:

**B. The Single Christian Expresses Manhood or Womanhood in the Family of God.**

Single believers may be unmarried for a season or for their whole life, but they are indeed part of a **family**: the local church. And they can serve their church family in distinctly masculine or feminine ways. Here are a few suggestions. Many of these apply to married men and women too, but here I want to focus for a moment on those who are unmarried or widowed.

**For [single] men:**

Remember from **Genesis 2:15** that Adam’s job description was to work and keep the Garden, which we explained as a charge to provide for and protect the sphere of responsibility God had entrusted to him. From this, there are a number of applications we could make for the single man’s relationships in the family of God:

* First, you can provide for other men ***spiritually***. W**hat does it mean exactly to be a follower of Jesus?** Fundamentally, it’s helping others follow Jesus. Paul told Timothy to treat younger men as “brothers” (**1 Tim 5:1**) – find a younger man and show him brotherly love by discipling him in the Word.
* And you can also provide for the ministry ***financially*** – [In some situations], single men may be able to give more money right now than you could if you were also caring for a wife and children. If the Lord has blessed you w/material resources, I encourage you to faithfully and joyfully steward it well! (**Acts 20:35** – “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*”)
* Second, you can take responsibility as a member to help ***protect the church*** in its doctrine. Study the Word for your own soul first, and then do it so that you might be equipped to teach it to others faithfully.
* Third, building off that, you should strive either to be an elder some day or at least to walk in the integrity that characterizes elders according to the qualifications in **1 Timothy 3** and **Titus 1**. Part of that includes “managing your household well,” which includes your finances, keeping your actual living space in order, and being dependable in your relationships and pure in your thought life.
* And lastly, seek to ***protect the ladies*** in the church in appropriate ways, whether it’s accompanying them on the city streets at night, helping them move, or other acts of brotherly service. Like Paul told Timothy, part of protecting women is to treat them “*with absolute purity*” (**1 Tim 5:2** NIV).

**For [single] women:**

First, we saw in **Gen 2:18** that Eve was created as Adam’s “*suitable helper*.” This means that you can express your femininity through a ***helpful, encouraging, eager-to-serve disposition***.

* So take that posture and apply it to your service to the church as a single woman. So for example, the elders who lead the church are men. I can tell you from experience: We need your ENCOURAGEMENT so that we continue to shepherd people well! But we also need your INPUT, so that we are aware of any bind spots so that we can pastor our church better. Your wisdom and perspective is invaluable to us!**]. So is your instinct to trust the elders and extend a willingness to help with whatever is needed?** I exhort you sisters to see this as a significant role in building up the body of Christ!
* Secondly, it’s also feminine to ***nurture the spiritual health*** of other women. Adam called his wife “Eve,” meaning giver of life; we can infer from this that femininity involves nurturing life in others – not only physical life through being a mother, which *some* women will do, but cultivating spiritual life, which *all* Christian women should do. Listen to Paul’s instruction in **Titus 2:3-5**,

“*Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good,****4****and so train the young women to love their husbands and children,****5****to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled*.”

* Note that you don’t need to be married to teach other women about marriage! All you need is the Word of God to help nurture life in other women in a motherly or sisterly way. (**ex:** *elderly woman passing out Scripture texts on slips of paper; For some of you that might mean sending out text messages or emails with wisdom and encouragement from God’s Word to other sisters in the church*)
* To that end, ***cultivate spiritual beauty*** as you relate to your brothers in Christ, married and unmarried. Peter’s instruction to wives is certainly applicable to single women, from **1 Pet 3:4**, “*Let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.*” And I don’t think Peter is primarily talking about personality here; you can be outgoing and talkative and still obey this verse. He’s talking about a woman who is content in the Lord, caring toward others, committed to the good of the church, and *not* self-centered when it comes to her own reputation and physical appearance.

**Any questions?**

**II. Biblical Masculinity and Femininity in the Context of Marriage**

Having talked a bit about single men and women in the family of the church, let’s now turn to husbands and wives in the home. Here’s the summary: ***Men and women are created equal, but with distinct, God-given roles within the family: the husband lovingly leads as provider and protector, and the wife respectfully submits to her husband as helper****.*

It’s important first to note that the Bible rejects the assumption that women are *inferior* to men. The Bible says men and women are equally made in God’s image, thus they’re of equal value, worth, and dignity (**Gen 1.26-27**), and equally heirs of the kingdom (**Gal 3.28**). The Bible also rejects the assumption that submission entails automatic obedience to what is wrong. It rejects the idea that a husband’s headship leads to or justifies male oppression and abuse. (***so*** ***if you see abusive leadership of any kind, but especially within the home, THAT IS NOT BIBLICAL***)

That said, let’s open our Bibles to **Ephesians 5:22-33** (*pg. 978 in pew Bibles*), as we turn to the Bible’s parameters for how husbands and wives relate to one another in the home.

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* ***23****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.* ***24****Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*

***25****Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,* ***26****that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,* ***27****so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* ***28****In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* ***29****For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,* ***30****because we are members of his body.* ***31****“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* ***32****This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.* ***33****However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

**Here are 4 observations we can make from this passage**:

*1. Paul calls wives to submit to their own husbands as to the Lord.*

In **verse 21**, Paul gives a command for Christians to submit to one another in humility; then starting in **verse 22**, he shows what he means by turning to ***specific***relationships that are to be characterized by godly leadership and submission. And He starts with marriage. So a woman’s submission to her husband doesn’t imply in *any* way that she is inferior to him. This is a matter of role, not value or worth.

Also, a wife is told to submit to her ***own***husband. Not to every man, but only ***her*** spouse. And wives should submit to their husbands “*as to the Lord*.” Does that mean that they are to regard and treat their husbands as omnipotent kings of the universe? Of course not! But part of a woman’s obedience to Christ is to follow His instruction to submit to the earthly authorities He has ordained, and in the family that authority is the husband. And that same phrase “as to the Lord” implies that the wife’s first allegiance is to Jesus Christ, and therefore Paul doesn’t in any way expect her to submit to her husband in anything that violates Scripture’s commands.

2. *The husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church.*

The word “head” in **v.23** implies authority. That’s obvious here because the text also says that Christ is the “head” of the church, and in **verse 24**, the church submits to Christ. And that analogy with Christ and the church helps us understand what headship looks like. It’s not brashly barking orders. It’s benevolent, loving, servant-minded leadership. The church follows Christ because he has proven his love for us by laying down his life, showing his radical commitment to our good. Did you notice the description there in **verse 29**, that he is to “*nourish and cherish*” her? That’s what headship means: *benevolent* leadership. And that leads to:

*3. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church.*

Paul doesn’t command husbands to “*be in* authority over your wife,” but rather to *love* them, and to do so “just as” Christ loved the church. **Think about what that means, husbands**: It may, for some, mean that you literally lay down your life and die for your wife. But for *all* husbands, it will certainly mean denying yourself and killing your pride. It will mean *actively* building up your wife spiritually. And even when the day’s been hard and you’re both exhausted, it will mean *frequently* subordinating your preferences and desires so that you can lead your wife to glorify God and pursue *her* joy even more than you pursue your own.

It’s a graphic quote, but I think it drives this point home pretty good. One church father commenting on **Ephesians 5:25,**

*“Do you wish that your wife would submit to you as the Church does to Christ? Then care for her, as Christ does for the Church; and if necessary that you should give your life for her, or be cut into pieces a thousand times, or endure anything whatsoever, then refuse it not; yes, for if you were to suffer in these dreadful ways for your wife, you still would not have done what Christ did for you. For you did this for one with whom you were already united; but He did it for her who, until then, had only rejected Him and hated Him.” –***Chrysostom**

So husbands, remember that your role, fundamentally, **is to spend your strength up for your wife’s good**. Hence **verse 26**, Christ *gave himself up* to sanctify the church. So brothers: Look for ways to love her, to honor her, to build her up and care for her so that she grows in godliness and contentment. (**Ex:** my 1st year of marriage/Terrance/Always answer your phone – Big Idea: ***Prioritize her in your life in such a way that she does not question your devotion to her***)

*4. Marriage speaks to the world about Christ’s relationship with his church.*

In **verses 31-32**, Paul says that God designed the institution of marriage to reflect and proclaim Christ’s love for his church. God *planned* from the very beginning for marriage to function in this way, even though that wasn’t clear until Christ came.

What this means is that these instructions for husbands and wives aren’t culturally conditioned or accidental. God designed marriage this way in order to teach the world about his own character and His Son’s love for His people. That means that **husbands have a** **high calling**. Your love – or lack of love – in marriage; your sacrifice – or lack of sacrifice – is emitting a radio signal out to the world about what Christ is like. In the same way, **wives have a** **high calling**. Your role in marriage is a parable about how God’s people are to respond to Christ – and that is something that this lost world desperately needs to see. Our world celebrates autonomy, independence, and self-reliance – all qualities that are totally contrary to Christianity! Where can our culture find a model of the trustful respect and joyful deference to worthy leadership that is part of believing in Christ? They can see it in you, if you’re a Christian wife. What a privilege that is!

**Questions?**

Let’s now take this framework and apply it to one of the most practical questions that comes up when we start talking about manhood and womanhood in the family: ***should a wife and mother work to earn income outside the home?***

**C. Application: Should a Mother Work Outside the Home?**

We’ve already seen from **Genesis 2** that the man’s job is to work and keep the Garden, and his wife is to be his helper. We just saw in **Eph 5** the husband’s calling to “nourish and cherish” his wife. Adam names his wife “Eve” because she is the life-giving mother, which speaks to her role in bearing children. Remember that the curses in **Genesis 3** specifically affect men and women’s previously defined roles: the man’s job in working the ground will now be difficult, and the wife’s bearing of children will now be painful. Now of course, men certainly don’t *only* put bread on the table, and not all women can have children. But all of this means that the husband’s role as provider and protector, and the wife’s role as the primary one to care for children isn’t some cultural construct or a “traditional” view. It’s part of God’s creation order. Indeed, the physical fact of a woman’s body being designed to feed her young reminds us of this.

But how does this speak to our family lives today? Remember, the question ISN’T, “Should a mother work?” The assumption is that husbands and wives both work full time. The question is where that work happens and whether it earns a paycheck. That’s important to remember in our day where one’s job is often wrongly the key to our **identity.** Work, for many, isn’t merely a means for food and shelter. It’s self-expression. It’s a purpose for life. It’s fulfillment, identity. For many, it’s the #1 idol in their heart. Don’t get me wrong: work inside or outside the home is certainly meaningful and important! But work makes a terrible god.

Well, the Bible doesn’t give us a **law** on whether a married woman, particularly one who has children to care for, should earn a paycheck outside the home or not. But that doesn’t mean that the Bible is silent on the distinctive tendencies that God has given us as men and women. With this topic, we are firmly in the category of biblical wisdom. Wisdom may be applied differently in different situations. For example, single mothers don’t exactly get the luxury of this question. If you’re a single-mom, you have the difficult and exhausting task of being both provider and helper to the family. Your diligence in that task is as admirable as it is challenging. We should also remember that in many families both parents may need to earn an income out of necessity. I want us to be careful here. Too often the question “Should a mother work outside the home” has had middle or upper-class assumptions behind it. We need to recognize that not everyone always gets the luxury of wrestling with this question. Still, it can be a helpful case study for us because it leads us to think about what are the universal inclinations of manhood and womanhood and how we can seek to express those inclinations in the home.

One key passage to consider is **Titus 2.3-5**: *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.”*

Some Christians have interpreted **Titus 2:5**, which says that wives should be “working at home,” or “busy at home,” to mean that any and all work outside the home is inappropriate. But the fact that the wife should *primarily* care for the home doesn’t necessarily imply that she shouldn’t ever work outside the home. The point of this phrase—consistent with the entire Bible all the way back, again, to Genesis—is that a woman should take it as her God-given *primary* responsibility to cultivate her home, providing a godly and nurturing environment for her family, regardless of whatever else she does.

It can be helpful here to clarify what we mean by the “home.” Critics of this verse have complained that it advances an oppressive, 1950s, Martha Stewart-esque domesticity, as if the essence of biblical womanhood is being a “domestic diva” who makes every meal from scratch and knits all her kids’ clothes by hand. Scripture, thankfully, doesn’t equate “working at home” with fitting some cultural mold of a “home maker.” The home, biblically speaking, is primarily about people and relationships. It has to do much more with those who live in the house and their spiritual well-being than the house itself. I’d recommend Courtney Reissig’s book, *The Accidental Feminist,* for more on this. Listen to her on this point: “The purpose of the home… is not to showcase all of your nice things and reveal that you have arrived as a domestic goddess. The purpose of the home is about ‘feeding souls, providing a refuge for the weary, and living generously.’ The home is a place of work. It’s a place where life happens…. The home is not the pinnacle of greatness—Christ is. God cares about our home because so much of life happens there.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Where do we see this scriptural view of a woman being primarily oriented toward the good of her home? Significantly, the same place where we see a woman engaging in successful business efforts *outside* the home: Proverbs 31. The woman depicted there has many responsibilities that fall outside the immediate contours of her home. She buys and sells land, plants vineyards, starts a textiles business. But all of this is done *to the end of* caring well for her family and fulfilling her responsibility to them. Verse 27, “She looks well to the ways of her household,” and so, verse 28, her children “rise up and call her blessed.” She doesn’t embark on her entrepreneurial endeavors in a quest to “find herself” or to make a name for herself. She does it to *serve* her family, and in the end it’s from her family—and especially from her husband—that she receives praise.

So here are some questions to consider regarding whether a mother should undertake some enterprise outside the home:

1. What are her **motives** for doing this? Does she want to make a name for herself outside the home, desiring the praise of the world? It’s hard to go to the neighborhood dinner party and say “I’m a homemaker.” You get that look like you’re a sell-out, a traitor to your own gender. It’s tough! And the temptation is to look to work outside the home for affirmation and identity. Suzie might work in finance because she cares mainly about the prestige; Sally might also work in finance but *mainly* because she wants to bless her family and her community, and she’s able to earn good money while still putting her first energies toward the home. There’s a difference of motive.
2. To what degree is her paycheck **necessary**? We can certainly imagine situations where both spouses need to work outside the home to make ends meet. But we’ve got to be careful here. If a certain amount of money seems like a necessity, is it possible that the family is aiming for too high of a lifestyle? Merely keeping up with the Joneses isn’t sufficient reason alone for a mom to take a job. And don’t forget: a wife’s work at home carries significant financial value in addition to all the other spiritual benefits! The Wall Street Journal regularly does studies on the replacement value of a stay-at-home mother and concludes that if you were to hire professionals to do all that a homemaker does, it would be the equivalent of a $100,000 salary!
3. What **gifts, talents, opportunities, and stewardships** has God given the wife in *this particular season of life*? How old are the kids and what kind of care do they require? What will it look like to cultivate a consistently sacrificial lifestyle? Will a secular job increase or diminish her ability to be a godly wife and mother?

Also, keep in mind that a decision about whether to work outside the home shouldn’t be a unilateral one on the part of the woman or the husband; rather, a wife and her husband should make it together, under his leadership as the head of the marriage and the family.

So the question isn’t *can* a mother work outside the home. Of course, she has the ability and the biblical warrant to do so. The question is, how does she wisely arrange her priorities to be that life-giving helper who brings health and stability to the family?

*Questions?*

1. *Assembly Intro:* Picture your stereotypical 1950s American family at 6pm on a weeknight. Which member of the household is taking that delicious roast out of the oven? And which one is sitting in the easy chair, shoes off, reading the newspaper and relaxing? Is that the picture that comes to mind when you hear the phrase “biblical manhood and womanhood in the home?” What does the Bible really say about men’s and women’s roles in the family? That’s what we want to consider today. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Courtney Reissig, *The Accidental Feminist* (Crossway: 2015), 120, 129. The quote within a quote is from Carolyn McCulley and Nora Shank, *The Measure of Success* (B&H: 2014), 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)