Biblical Manhood and Womanhood in the Home, Part 2[[1]](#footnote-1)

**I. Introduction**

“Women are not happy even when they do follow the blueprint” for marriage and family.[[2]](#footnote-2) So wrote Germaine Greer in 1970 in her manifesto *The Female Eunuch*, in which she argued that the nuclear family is an oppressive structure designed to prey on women for men’s pleasure. She boldly envisioned a day when men would thank women for moving society beyond the traditional family to a new vista of freedom and openness.

Whether or not you think Greer was right, we’ve certainly inherited her suspicion of men and women playing different roles in the home. But our culture hasn’t yet jettisoned the institution of the family as she hoped. We still want the family, but we want to do it our way, with whatever combination of genders and roles one prefers.

How should we think about men and women when it comes to the home? As we’ve seen throughout this class, though scripture may challenge us, it also holds out to us a glorious vision of the joy-filled life – including family life. The Bible says men and women are equally created in the image of God. In Christ, they are equal heirs of his kingdom. Because of this, we as Christians can evaluate the arguments of feminists like Greer with both appreciation and critique. She and others in the ‘60s and ‘70s were *right* to argue that being a woman is far more dignified, significant, and multi-faceted than living as a suburban housewife who **only** exists to bear children and clean the home. They were *wrong,* though, to call women to find value in womanhood itself and in re-defining the family. As creatures, both men and women, we are called not to self-definition, but to submission to the Creator who has made us in his image and graciously given us complementary roles to play as we display his glory in our families.

Last week we began looking at those roles in the home. Bobby reminded us from Ephesians 5 about what it means that a husband is the provider and protector who lays down his life for his wife in love, like Christ loves the church. We thought about how God calls a wife to submit to her husband’s spiritual leadership. Not because she’s inferior, but because she is called and created to reflect how the church submits to Christ.

We thought about singleness and the home, for both men and women, because the Bible celebrates the value and advantages of singleness (1 Cor 7). Jesus lived an abundant, full life as a single, celibate man. Single men, whether they live with relatives, roommates, or alone, are still wired to provide for and protect others in a fatherly way. Single women likewise are still wired to cultivate life and help others flourish in a motherly way– whether that be roommates, hospitality to those in need, evangelism to neighbors, etc.

Today, we’ll see what 1 Peter 3 has to say about manhood and womanhood in marriage, and then we’ll turn to a grab bag of prudential, practical questions – how do husbands and wives manage decision-making, various duties, disciplining the kids, and stuff like that. Let me say from the outset that for those who are single, today might feel like the most marriage-focused of the whole course, as we’re trying to get to the nitty-gritty of how men and women’s roles are expressed in the family setting. Don’t tune out. Three pieces of advice: First, try to learn from these principles about the general ways that God has made men and women beautifully distinct. Second, use these teachings as a way to pray for your married friends. They need your support and encouragement. Third, if you desire to be married in the future, then use this time to help you see what really matters in a spouse and to think about how God might call you to live in marriage.

**II.** Let’s begin by turning to **1 Peter 3:1-7.**

*Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives,* ***2****when they see your respectful and pure conduct.* ***3****Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—* ***4****but 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.* ***5****For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands,* ***6****as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.*

***7****Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*

What does Peter say here about men and woman in the marriage relationship? He addresses wives first, and teaches:

*A. Godly submission is powerful, beautiful and rewarding.*

Last week, we said that a wife’s submission means something like “voluntary yielding in love” to her husband—in other words, a willing determination to follow and affirm her husband as the head and leader of the family. Submission is most fundamentally a gift that a wife offers, rather than a duty that a husband demands from her.[[3]](#footnote-3) It’s hers to give.

We see back in 2:12 that Peter is calling believers, as a royal priesthood, to live among the Gentiles with honorable conduct. He’s saying non-Christians are going to see your life. And your life will either commend the gospel or make it seem less plausible to a watching world. How do believers make the gospel attractive? By submitting to authority, Peter says. In our relationships, whether it’s citizens submitting to the government, servants to masters, and here, wives to husbands, we model what it looks like to be people who delight in God’s authority. In fact, what’s in view here is a wife making the gospel compelling to none other than her husband, who’s not a believer – he hasn’t obeyed the gospel word.

So, what does this attitude of submission look like in a marriage – whether your husband is converted or even if he’s not? Peter notes three things:

1. First, it involves “respectful and pure conduct,” verse 2. In verse 1, Peter even says that this conduct can “win” a husband to the Lord. Ladies, by the way you submit, God can use your behavior to convince a husband that the gospel is true! He’s giving us a picture of a wife who exhibits glad servant-heartedness, not grumbling stubbornness. She affirms and respects whatever is good about her husband’s leadership. She helps him flourish even when it’s hard. She’s not a doormat – she has her own ideas and opinions, but she uses them to help her husband grow rather than to undermine him. She may disagree with him sometimes and confront him when he’s in sin, but she’s a joy to lead. He needs her. She shows that she’s willing to trust him.
2. Second, this attitude of submission isn’t seen in a woman’s external style but in “the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit,” verse 4. Peter’s not forbidding all jewelry or certain hairstyles here. But what he’s saying is that you shouldn’t rely on your appearance to make yourself attractive to your husband. Physical beauty is superficial and fleeting. It tends to call attention to itself. But spiritual beauty – character – lasts and becomes richer over time. It tends to flow outward and beautify others. Peter says when a woman values this kind of beauty, she is like a daughter of Sarah. She has that beauty of character that makes her wonderfully compelling to her husband. Now, don’t misunderstand: this “imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit” doesn’t mean that being introverted is a form of godliness. This isn’t a matter of how much you talk, but of where your heart rests. What he’s talking about is a woman who gladly rests content in following her husband’s leadership rather than brashly taking the reins. This is the spirit that is “very precious” in God’s sight.
3. Third, this submissive posture helps a woman trust and do good, not fear. Why would Paul mention “fear” here? Because he knows that having this kind of spirit toward a person you know to be a sinner—submitting yourself to him and committing to following his leadership—can be a frightening thing. And yet that’s what God calls a woman to do. And it requires her to put her ultimate faith in God, her final provider, protector and authority. So submitting to her husband fuels her faith. Because it causes her to rely on God daily. No, she should *not* keep submitting if her husband becomes abusive and forfeits his right to lead. In that case, she should love him by getting other authorities involved to protect herself and prevent him from the consequences of his own future sin. But normally, submission even to an imperfect man yields not fear but restful trust in the Lord.

So, to be clear, submission isn’t necessarily a certain *behavior* that a wife will do every day. Most days, the couple will simply be living life, seeking to honor the lord, not facing major decisions or disagreements. They will sharpen each other as equals, as intimate companions. Submission is more of an *ongoing posture and pattern of* trustful respect. It flavors the whole marriage relationship. It’s all of life. And I hope what you see in all of this is that submission in marriage isn’t designed to be a burden. It’s a posture of beauty, life, and ultimately strength. The wife who embraces this calling doesn’t sacrifice her ability to influence others and make a positive contribution in her family. Rather, it’s *through* submission, by God’s grace, that she powerfully produces growth, godliness, and fruit in her husband and children.

Next, in verse 7, (turn page in handout), Peter instructs husbands that

*B. Godly leadership is considerate and selfless.*

1. First, Peter says that husbands should live with their wives “in an understanding way.” Paul calls husbands to love their wives by nourishing them physically and spiritually in Eph 5, and Peter helpfully spells out that love involves not just caring for your wife, but *knowing* her. Seeking to understand her, deep down. Marriage is a union of not just two separate people, but people who are differently gendered. Thus, they need to work to know each other. Union requires intimate knowledge. A husband should spend time listening tohis wife, contemplating what makes her tick, studying her. Husbands, do you know what are your wife’s desires, fears, and frustrations? What makes her feel loved and cared for at the end of a hard day? What are her strengths, and how can you spur her on as she serves Christ? What are her struggles, and how can you comfort her where she is weak? Those are the kinds of questions we should be constantly asking. Notice that Peter’s command to you as a husband isn’t that you should *lead* your wife. That’s assumed. His calling is to *know* your wife. If you don’t gently and humbly seek to understand her, your leadership won’t conform to the servant-hearted leadership modeled by Christ.

2. Second, Peter says that husbands should show “honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.” What does he mean by “weaker vessel?” He’s *not* saying that women are morally or spiritually inferior – we know that because of all the other texts we’ve been looking at in this class like Genesis 1 and Galatians 3. He may have in mind physical strength, speaking in general and broad terms. Women’s relatively lesser degree of muscular strength puts them at more risk to be taken advantage of in marriage, statistically speaking. Husbands shouldn’t exploit that weakness but should see it as an opportunity to show honor, tenderly treasuring their wives.

Or, Peter may be mainly referring to the wife’s role as the one who submits. Adopting that role puts the wife in a *position* or postureof weakness relative to her husband, because she’s committing to respect and trust his leadership. And what Peter’s saying is that husbands shouldn’t take advantage of this, but rather should honor their wives for it. Don’t leverage your leadership role for your own benefit, he’s saying. Rather, esteem your wife with respect, admiration and care. Pour yourself out to help her flourish. Treat her, as he says later in the verse, *not* as an inferior, because she’s not! She’s an heir with you of the grace of life. So husbands, do you recognize and thank your wife for the sacrifices she makes to submit – to a loser like you? In fact, Peter warns that if we don’t honor our wives and put their needs first, we’ll hinder our prayers from being answered. I don’t know exactly what he means, but I know that is not a situation I want to be in!

Any ***comments/questions*** before we move on?

Let’s turn now to a few questions to flesh out practically what all of this looks like in a real marriage. How do these principles play out on the ground?

*1. How should husbands and wives make decisions?*

There’s a delicate balance, a dance you might say, when a husband and wife face consequential decisions. On the one hand, as the head of the family (Gen 2; Eph 5.23), the husband should feel responsibility to set the direction and lead. He’s not to abdicate or passively stand by hoping his wife will just make the decision for him. On the other hand, he must remember that his leadership is to be marked by service, that his wife is a fellow-heir with him of God’s promises. And that she often has complementary strengths. Because of that, the husband needs to listen and enlist his wife’s wisdom and perspective about the issue at hand. The wife shouldn’t blindly follow her husband, but use her resources to empower him. They should make the decision as each other’s most trusted friend and counselor.

To husbands, to love “like Christ” will frequently mean *denying* your own preferences and desires to seek God’s glory and your wife’s good. So hear me clearly, men. As we touched on last week, it is likely sin, and certainly *stupid* to play the headship card on stuff like what restaurant to visit, how to spend your free time on a Saturday. Husbands shouldn’t play the “I’m the leader, you must submit to me” card like a trump card in mere matters of preference.

What about in a significant matter, when you talk and pray and talk and you simply can’t come to agreement? I like how Tim Keller puts it in *The Meaning of Marriage:* “In the vast majority of cases, the stalemate is broken because each will try to give the other his or her pleasure. The wife will try to respect the husband’s leadership, and the husband will in turn try to please his wife.”[[4]](#footnote-4) But in those rare cases where no agreement can be found, it is the *husband’s* responsibility to lead graciously and gently, and it’s the wife’s responsibility to follow - humbly and not angrily or dragging her feet.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Husbands, your wife will sometimes struggle to follow your leadership. Be patient with her. Recognize you likely give her reasons every day to be annoyed with you! Figuring out how to take the lead in decision-making while honoring and empowering your wife is much more art than science. Sit down for coffee with an older man and try to learn from his example.

Wives, your husbands will screw-up. Jesus doesn’t, but they do. I’m sorry. But that’s also why husbands make terrible saviors. So look to Jesus as you seek to be quick to forgive. And help your husband see why the ship sank. He doesn’t live in your world every day, so *enlighten* him. Review, forgive, try to learn, and move on.

One danger I find common, especially in young men, is not overbearing autocratic behavior but lazy passivity. Men, don’t pursue *passivity for the sake of peace.* Too often we trade temporary peace for lasting division. That’s exactly what you’re doing when you cave on what you think is best simply to avoid a hard discussion with potentially painful consequences. For years, I know I personally thought “love” meant “don’t upset her.” That’s actually a self-serving definition. It’s not first seeking her good, but yours. Biblical love is to risk upsetting. It says I love your lasting good more than our temporary peace.

Here’s an **example from our marriage**. Erica was considering leaving her job as a speech therapist at a hospital to work for a private company instead. She’d make less money, but the new job would be more flexible and convenient, and we knew an adoption situation could come along any day when she would really need the flexibility. Well, she came to me to get my thoughts. Classic opportunity to step up and lead. And I froze! I’m thinking, well, I like the convenience aspect, but it’d be too bad to lose that extra salary… and she’s looking at me saying “I don’t know what to do, I have some preferences and thoughts, but can you please lead the way!?” You see, I wrongly assumed that loving her was letting her do what she wanted. You have your career, I have mine. I stupidly thought *respecting* her was *releasing* her. But she rightly wanted to be shepherded through the decision. Husbands, God has called us into that role of being loving shepherds.

***Questions?***

2*. How should a husband and wife manage other duties and responsibilities?*

A good general principle is that duties and responsibilities should be allocated in such a way that both encourages and enhances the feminine and masculine aspects of gender. That’s the principle, but the Bible doesn’t lay down any hard and fast rules. There are many things in the daily affairs of a household that the scripture doesn’t categorize as either “masculine” or “feminine.” Running an errand. Watering plants. Cooking a meal. Those are household duties, but we would be hard pressed to say they’re uniquely male or female duties.

I *would* suggest that men generally should bear the more physically taxing tasks of the home, especially if “weaker vessel” in 1 Pet 3 is a reference to physical strength. So whether it’s moving heavy furniture, or transporting those 30lb propane grill tanks to and from the car, I think men should instinctively try to bear such responsibilities. Considering a man’s responsibility to protect and provide, I’m also not going to ask Erica to check out a suspicious noise in the house at night. Assuming I’m both present and physically able, that’s what I ought to do as the man.

Similarly, thinking of the charge in Gen 2.15 for Adam to “*work and keep*” the garden, it will be consistent with a masculine disposition for a husband to manage more of the affairs related to *provision*. If there’s no food on the table, he should feel the responsibility for that. But the husband’s leadership in provision doesn’t mean he must do it all. His leadership doesn’t mean he does every activity. Nor on the other hand, does her submission mean *she* does everything while he stands aloof. Rather, his leadership will look like taking loving initiativeto set the priorities and direction of the family and conspiring with her on how they can together honor Christ. His wife may be more detail oriented and thus more responsible at handling the bills. He might be more gifted in the kitchen than she is. Either way, they each lean into their own gifts while at the same time expressing their gender in distinctively feminine/motherly or masculine/fatherly ways.

Broadly speaking, thinking of Titus 2:5 from last week where we saw mature women teaching other women to be “busy at home,” a woman’s disposition will be more oriented toward the relationships of the home and the hour-by-hour care of the kids – note how the woman in Proverbs 31 is concerned to clothe and feed her family. The *important thing is to discuss it*! It’s the husband’s job to lead them in discussing their various stewardships together so that there is mutual understanding and not confusion.

*3. How should husband and wife lead, care for, and discipline their children?*

As we’ve talked about, the husband is ultimately responsible for the spiritual and physical oversight of the home, including the instruction and discipline of his children. Eph 6:4—“*Fathers*, *do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*.”

Paul didn’t say, “*mothers*, train your children in the ways of the Lord.” But “*fathers!*” It’s fundamentally your responsibility. In a fallen world, some single moms, or women married to unbelievers, will have to take up this responsibility, and God is faithful to provide strength. But if there’s a Christian man in the home, it’s your responsibility to see that devotions are taking place. It’s your responsibility to see that the family makes it to church.

Within that ultimate responsibility, however, the pattern in scripture is that the immediate, day-to-day management of children and the domain of the household falls under the purview of the wife. 1 Timothy 5:14 says wives are to “*manage their households.*” The Greek word “*manage*” is a strong term. It implies action, activity. It involves thoughtfulness, planning, a high level of attention and competence, along the lines of Proverbs 31. Remember Eve’s role as the “life-giver” from Genesis 3. Practically, this means that mom will likely spend more time with the kids (at least during the day, and especially when they are young), and will discipline her children as appropriate when her husband is not present. Sisters, if you are spending most of your hours these days caring for kids, remember that that’s an awesome calling God has given to you. The days may seem repetitive and exhausting, but God sees your service and delights to provide you with grace and strength.

A father, meanwhile, should teach his children to respect, honor, and esteem their mother whether he’s present or not. I’ve been helped by learning from other dads in the church who take a zero-tolerance policy when any of the children show disrespect toward their mom. She’s not just their mom, but my wife, whom God calls them to honor. Discipline in such situations is swift and sure.

Also, a husband shouldn’t be passive in his instruction and discipline of his children, leaving the work to his wife when he is present. How often do I come home, sit down for dinner, and Lena starts to get fussy and upset? I’m tired after work, and tempted just to leave it to Erica. But what’s she been doing all day?! Isn’t she equally if not more tired? Husbands, we must step in.

As we think about marriage and parenthood, we must remember that there are so many believers who desire marriage or children and the Lord in his mysterious providence hasn’t given these gifts. No matter your circumstances of life, don’t neglect the Bible’s call to manage your home in an honorable way, whether you’re single, or a married couple without kids. Men, use your home to provide for and protect others. Host meals. Have people over to encourage them spiritually. Take care of your living space. Show brotherly care for your roommates and neighbors. Ladies, make your home a place where your spiritual beauty shines. Use your home to foster spiritual life in others, whomever God puts in your path. Practice hospitality. Cultivate sisterly love for roommates, friends, church members and your community. Take these principles and apply them to your situation, even if you are praying for a spouse or for children and waiting on our compassionate God. **Any questions? [Pray]**

1. Class Introduction: We’ve thought a lot about what it means to be male and female, but how does this play out in the realm of the home between a husband and a wife? How should decisions be made? What do you do when you disagree? How should duties be allocated? Whether you’re single or married, all are welcome. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Germaine Greer, Introduction to *The Female Eunuch*, 1970, https://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/greer-germaine/female-eunuch.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Tim & Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage,* 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Keller, 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As an aside, here’s the thing about leadership. Everybody *thinks* they want leadership, because they associate leadership with the authority, the power to make all the decisions. But leadership, whether it’s in the home, church, workplace – it’s fundamentally about being responsible for the welfare of others. It’s not “what do I want,” but “what do they need.” The best leaders therefore are usually those who approach their role with a healthy dose of fear and trembling and total reliance on God for wisdom. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)