

**"Biblical Womanhood"
(Ephesians 5:21-31)
Pastor Peter Yi
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²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."

Last week we made our way into the subject of Biblical manhood and womanhood. In that message we mentioned how radically our culture has shifted in redefining gender, and how that shift has brought about terrible confusion. Because our children are worshipping with us today, I think it's worthwhile to highlight some of last week's discoveries.

Before we even looked at the subject of Biblical manhood and womanhood, we brought up the question of authority. There are many sources of authority and information for a person, but for a Christian, our final authority is the Bible. We believe that in the Bible God has revealed to us everything we need to live a life to honor and glorify him. It's from the Bible that God reveals to us who he is, as well as his will for humanity, and part of that purpose is to know and live out our God-given gender identities.

We also established that when God created human beings, he created them binary, it a set of two, one person is a male and the other person was a female. So when God created human beings, both man and woman were created in the image of God. They both had equal value and worth and dignity as God's only image bearers. Both are to relate to God in relationship, in worship and obedience. The man wasn't better than the woman. The woman wasn't better than the man. They were complementary meaning that in some ways they were different. The man is not a woman and the woman is not a man. Yet they needed each other. It must be emphasized that gender differences were not the result of sin first entering the world. Gender differences are to be celebrated because they were a part of God's perfect design in creation.

When sin entered the world, it made a mess of everything, even our gender. The confusion that some people may have about gender came as a result of sin, which is a rejection of God and his perfect ways. We as a church must faithfully teach and model beautiful manhood and womanhood to each other and to our children. Our children need to see in all adults, but especially in their moms and dads what it means to be a man and a woman. And we must with great humility walk alongside our friends who are struggling with gender identity issues, as we lead them to God's plan. Jesus Christ came not only for our justification, that is to declare us not guilty, but He also came for our sanctification, so that the chains of sin would be loosed and we would become holy. A big part of that holiness is related to gender, as gender is who we are and influences nearly everything we do.

A helper

Now today we are looking at the subject of Biblical womanhood and then next week we'll address the subject on Biblical manhood. In today's and next week's sermons we are asking the following questions. What does it mean to be a woman? What does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be a wife? What does it mean to be a husband? We can get even more specific. What does it mean to be a Christian woman as opposed to being a Christian man, and vice-versa? If we answer with things like, worship God, obey God, love others, serve, do missions, and things like that, there is nothing that is specific to each person's manhood or womanhood. These are things that would apply to young, old, new, seasoned, male, female, in fact, *all* Christians. But what does it mean to be a Christian woman, or a Christian man? Another way to look at it is this. In our families and in our church, would it be clear to each other and especially to our children, what these differences are? This is what we will be trying to address in this message.

Now, as you can tell, I am not a woman, so I come to this subject with a bit of intrepidation, and humility. There's the potential of offending half of the people in this room. So here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to approach this subject like I approach every subject. I'm going to speak from the Scriptures.

Let's begin by going, once again, to the creation story. I'm reading from Genesis 2:18-22.

¹⁸ The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a **helper** suitable for him."¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable **helper** was found.²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh.²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

What does it mean for the woman to be the helper? One author says it like this, "Helper' in the original Hebrew means one who supplies strength in the area that is lacking." She goes on to write. "This isn't a wimpy role! We magnify God as we embrace the calling to come alongside our husbands and gladly supply strength where they need it." In the marriage context it's a bit easier to describe. First it tells us that the man can't do it all by himself. It also tells us that the man is not more important than the woman. It tells us that the man and the woman need each other. This is not only true in the family, but also true in the church, and in society.

In terms of being the helper, the one that supplies strength where it is lacking, I think every godly man would say that this is true. Even in our church, when you look at every man in any leadership role in our church as pastors, elders and deacons, all of them are what they are because of their wives. In some cases it's so blaringly obvious because we know what the men were like when they were single. Now this doesn't mean that the leaders who are single are any less complete, but I'm just saying that in the context of marriage it is most evidently seen.

Many wives are immensely gifted and much more competent at many things than their husbands. It's important that we don't look down upon our husbands, or to take the attitude of 'if you want something done right, you gotta do it yourself.' Rather wives should come alongside as a helper and encourage them to be leaders in the family and at church. Specifically wives can look at what their husbands excel at, and then look at where they are deficient, and see if they can come alongside and fill in those deficiencies.

So, ask yourself, is there this complementarian component to your marriage? Are both of you cultivating this aspect of helper in your marriage?

A quiet and gentle spirit

There's another aspect to godly womanhood, or godly femininity. For this we turn to 1 Peter 3:1-6:

¹ Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. ⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

What is the Apostle Peter getting at here? He is saying that one of the things that women can get overly focused on is their outward appearance. Peter mentions that women can get caught up with the way their hair looks. They can get overly focused on their clothing and accessories. Both men and women of course can do this, but in particular women. I know some of you are thinking, "No....really?" Yes, I know it's hard to believe, but it's true. Consider the cosmetics industry? A vast percentage is targeted at women, more than men. Go to any department store. Much more floor space is occupied for women's clothing than for men's. Consider the plastic surgery industry. It's pretty obvious that the target audience is women, more than men. Women, more than men, perhaps inherently, are more concerned about outward appearance.

So what does Peter suggest instead? He says, in particular to women, in Holy Scripture,

⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves.

Now, we can read that and cry sexism, but it isn't sexism. It's a command that reflects God's design differences between men and women. Just as the Bible has some specific commands to men, there are also some specific commands to women. Our instinct mustn't be to cry 'sexism or discrimination', but to first approach God's word with humility, and then with a mind and heart to understand, and then obedience.

Peter is telling women to focus instead on inner beauty, which is unfading. And the inner beauty, he characterizes this way, a gentle and quiet spirit. What does that mean? What does that look like? I don't think it's referring to personality. I don't think it can because our personalities are all so different from quiet to loud. That would mean that every extroverted woman would have to be silenced. I'm certain that is not what it means. What then? Well, the clue comes from the woman Peter uses as an example. He cites Sarah, the matriarch of our faith. Sarah was the wife of Abraham. And if you remember, Abraham had some incredible qualities, but in some key instances, he failed miserably. Well what in particular about Sarah does Peter commend? First, they were holy women. They were godly women. They feared God and they obeyed God. This was their adornment. So, women today can also learn from Sarah and other great women, as an example of holiness. She did what was right and she did not give way to fear; she submitted to her husband's godly leadership.

I'll give you an example from our marriage. Now, I've shared this story before, but I think it applies very well to this. In 2008-2009 our family was living up in Newmarket. We moved there thinking that this would be our last stop. Up to that point we had moved 7 times in about 12 years. We were tired of moving. But we noticed that it was taking more time than we expected for our kids to settle into their schools. There were some bullies, some racism, some run ins with the neighbors. But finally after two long years, it began to feel like home. Then I had one of those very rare moments where I knew God was speaking to me and he told me that we needed to move back to Toronto. As our church was just getting into local missions, I heard God saying, if you want to lead your church to love and serve the city, then you need to live in the city.

I was convinced. It made sense. But I knew Linda would be resistant because of the reasons I stated above. So I prayed that God would also convince her. I prepared my case. It had three points, because every pastor has three points. Point 1. God's call back to the city. Point 2. Giving our kids more convenient access to church as they were entering youth group. 3. The commute into and out of Toronto was getting worse every year.

At first she resisted, again, for the reasons above, but by the end of the conversation she had agreed. She did not give way to fear. She trusted the Lord. And submitted to her husband. In doing these things she was being holy. She was being like Sarah. In this decision she was exemplifying the unfading inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.

Submission

With this final point, let's get to the heart of submission. Let me read the relevant verses from today's text:

²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." (**Ephesians 5:22–24**)

However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (**Ephesians 5:33**)

I realize that the idea of submission conjures up a lot more negative ideas than positive ideas. We might think of oppression like a master abusing a slave. We might think of an overbearing boss. Or you may have grown up in a family where dad was a tyrant who ruled with an iron fist. Or you may have grown up around men who loved these verses and made sure all the women around them knew these verses, but did very poorly in living out their responsibility to love women like Christ, at the expense of their own lives. So it's understandable for women (and men) to have a very negative understanding of this word.

The teaching that wives are to submit to their husbands is found in several verses. Two of them we already read, Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3. Here are the two others:

Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (**Colossians 3:18**)

to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. (**Titus 2:5**)

What does this all mean? First, everyone is called to submit to God, that is, to obey God, to live for God, to do his will. And though we don't always do so, we know we are to do it with joy. Our submission isn't supposed to be with teeth gritted, but with an inner delight. We desire to please our heavenly Father, and joyfully serve Christ, and seek to make happy the Holy Spirit.

The previous verse tells us we are to submit to each other out of reverence for Christ. The New Testament tells us we are to submit to the leaders of the church, to your pastors and elders. We are also to submit to the ruling authorities as citizens and residents of this nation.

Children also are commanded to submit to the authority of their parents, in the Lord. This is their way of living out God's will for their lives. When they submit to their parents, they are submitting to God. And they too should obey their parents with joy.

Second, we know that the entire life of Christ was lived in joyful and willful submission to God the Father. Jesus never did a single action, never said a single word, that wasn't the will of God the Father. In everything he lived and modeled for us what a life of submission to God should look like. When we make light of submission, we make light of the whole person of Christ. So specifically, for women, in this command to submit, this is your opportunity to emulate Christlikeness.

Third, wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Okay, let's unpack this. By merging the husband-wife relationship with the relationship between the church and Jesus Christ, the argument packs a lot of truthful force. Let's look at the relationship between the church and the Lord. The passage tells us that Jesus is the Lord, He is the Christ, God's chosen Messiah, he's the head, meaning he is the authority, the leader, and he is the Savior. It is to this person that the church submits. In what manner does the church submit to Christ? In everything. Is there a single area in which the church does not submit to Christ, and submit with joy? No. But why everything? Because Jesus is Lord, and if was 'in most things' or 'in some things', then we all know what would happen. The list of all the exceptions would begin to grow and we'd focus more on those things than on the areas where we are to submit. So, in the same way, wives must seek to live out this command.

How does this look like in real life?

1. It's only in the Lord. All of our obedience to everyone and anyone, is in the Lord.
2. In deferring final decision making to him, in cases of a stale mate. All married people will tell you there are dozens, hundreds of times where men have heeded the advice and followed the instructions of their wives. And there are even more times where they've made decisions together. But there are times at important junctures where the husband and wife are at a stalemate, at which point, the wife defers to the husband's decision.
3. In following his leadership in the family. Women do everything they can to encourage and support their husband's authority and leadership and make sure they don't undermine it, especially in front of the children. This implies that men must lead like Christ, which we'll get into next week.

Objections:

1. My husband's a bum. This is not an excuse. If you apply this as an exception clause, then your husband can apply similar exception clauses for why he shouldn't sacrificially love you.
2. My husband is not a Christian. Peter tells us that this still applies. And it is in fact one of the means to win them over to Christ.
3. The submission issue may be more of spiritual issue than it is a gender issue.

Now, I could not possibly address everything that needed to be said.

I hope that as we continue to grow in Christ that each single person, and each family, and our entire church, can live out God's design for manhood. This is God's will for us in Christ.

Let's pray.