



GOD'S DESIGN

The Gospel and Sexuality

Alright, here we go. We're going to dive right back in. We've got a lot of ground to cover, and we're already...as is the case oftentimes...we're running a little behind. So, God's design for sexuality, marriage, singleness, parents, children, and we've got some special cases that I want us to talk about: the orphans and widows.

So, we'll start with the gospel and sexuality, and this is, indeed, where it all starts. Everything we talk about, tonight, comes back to an understanding of what it means to be male and female, to be a man and a woman, a distinction that is being tragically minimized and maligned in so many ways in our day. John Piper said,

The tendency today is to stress the equality of men and women by minimizing the unique significance of our maleness or femaleness. But this depreciation of male and female personhood is a great loss. It has taken a tremendous toll on generations of young men and women who do not know what it means to be a man or a woman. Confusion over the meaning of sexual personhood today is epidemic. The consequence of this confusion is not a free and happy harmony among gender-free persons relating on the basis of abstract competencies. The consequence rather is more divorce, more homosexuality, more sexual abuse, more promiscuity, more social awkwardness, and more emotional distress and suicide that come with the loss of God-given identity.

Elisabeth Elliot said,

Throughout the millennia of human history, up until the past two decades or so, people took for granted that the differences between men and women were so obvious as to need no comment. They accepted the way things were. But our easy assumptions have been assailed and confused, we have lost our bearings in a fog of rhetoric about something called equality, so that I find myself in the uncomfortable position of having to belabor to educated people what was once perfectly obvious to the simplest peasant.

Why is sexuality so important?

Why is sexuality so important? This issue touches every part of life, more than just gender. This issue shapes our comprehension of God, impacts our understanding of the gospel. This issue reflects our confidence in Scripture.

Let me go ahead and warn you: in this section we're about to dive into in the Word, in the process, we're going to find ourselves totally going against the prevailing thoughts in our day about men and women. We're going to dive into some things that are going to cause some people to say, "That is chauvinistic." If not to say it, to think it...chauvinistic, prejudiced, antiquated, at best. I want to show you it's not. What we're about to see in God's Word is good, and I need you to hang with me through some of the challenges that

culture would put against God's Word, not tune me out at this point or that point. Remember, the big question is, are we going to trust His Word or are we going to write it off like so many, even in the church, have done?

This issue affects our conduct in the church and our behavior in the home. How we understand what it means to be a male and female affects the way we love our spouses, the way we train our children. What does it mean to train sons? What does it mean to train daughters? Is there a difference in the two? This issue affects how we thrive as singles. What it means to be a single man or a single woman, and why that's important.

Three Initial Foundations...

So, here are three initial foundations, based on Genesis 1:26-31. Follow along with me.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth..." [And he continues on, all the way to the end.] And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Okay. Three initial foundations. Number one: God created men and women, clearly, with equal dignity. In verse 26, God creates man and woman in His own image. Both of them with equal value before God. Equal importance before God. Equal dignity before each other, and this is where any conversation about manhood and womanhood must start...from the place where the Bible starts...that men and women have equal dignity. Meaning, in any culture, in any relationship where man is thought to be better than woman, or woman is thought to be better than man, in any culture, any relationship where men or women are treated as inferior, as objects to be used or abused, then we are undercutting the very design of God. For all of eternity, no sex, man or woman, will be greater than the other. No person should feel superior or inferior because they are a man or a woman.

We are all...each...created in the image of God. What does it mean to be in His image? It means that we resemble God. We're like God. Even in our differences from God, there's still resemblance. That's what I love about Psalm 94:9. We know that God is spirit. He doesn't have a physical body. God the Father does not have a physical body like we do, but Psalm 94 says, "*He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?*" I love that. God doesn't have physical eyes, but He sees. He doesn't have physical ears, but He hears, and so, our physical qualities resemble His personal qualities. We resemble God.

We represent God. That's why God said, "Be fruitful. Multiply. Fill the earth. Subdue it. Rule over it. Spread my image all over creation." Just like we see later in Daniel 3, although it's equated with idolatry there, a picture of representation spreading. The picture is God's image spreading across the earth for His glory. We resemble God. We represent God, and we all have the capacity to relate to God. There's a relationship here in Genesis 2 between God and man that is unlike anything else in all creation. Psalm 8. We relate to God in a way that cats and dogs, and seas and mountains, even angels do not, cannot, and don't have the capacity to relate to God. So, finally, for us to be in His image means that we all have

personal responsibility before God. We've talked about this. We will all stand before God as judge. Men and women were given commands from the very beginning in Genesis 1:28. Be fruitful and multiply, and even that command was intended on them being man and woman. In order to multiply, you have to have a man and a woman, and we'll get to that later tonight.

So, the key is, from the start of Scripture, God undercuts any kind of male or female superiority. It is not right. It is never right to disparage or belittle man or woman. Sexual inferiority, superiority, male dominance, female exploitation, all of these things are sinful violations of the design of God. He's created men and women with equal dignity.

Now, that leads to Genesis 2, where we see a parallel account of creation and the second truth: God created men and women with different roles.

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

So, here we see in Genesis 2 that God has created male and female distinct for a reason. This is more than just a difference in anatomy. This is more than just biological triviality or some accident. This is God creating man for a reason and woman for a reason. Both in the image of God, but each with different roles, and God's desire...God is teaching us, here in Genesis 2, those roles if we will listen. If we'll listen, we will see that biblically men and women were created to complement one another beautifully and wonderfully, complement one another. Harmonize with one another. Fit with one another. They go together in a way that is being denied, denigrated, disregarded today. Twisted into all kinds of caricatures that are not the design of God, and as a result, many are ignoring this.

I want you to see this...these wonderfully complementary roles of man and woman. First, with man because that's where Genesis 2 starts. By the design of God, man was created to be the head. Now, I use that word "head" in the same way the New Testament uses the word "head" to describe the man, the husband in a marriage relationship. 1 Corinthians 11:3, "*But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*" The head of a wife is her husband, God's Word teaches. Ephesians 5:23, which we'll look at more in-depth when we talk about marriage, says, "*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.*"

The picture here, in both these verses, is one of being the head, having leadership and even authority in the relationship with woman, not in a way that leads to male domination, undercutting the equality or value in any way. We just saw that that would go completely against the design of God. We're talking about role here. So, think: I'm a father. I have two sons. I have a position of leadership in their lives, a good position of leadership that's

designed by God. That doesn't mean I'm more human than they are, more valuable than they are in any way. It's simply a picture of a role that God has designed to be good.

So, in Genesis 2, God created man to be the head, and woman was created to be the helper. This is the word that's used twice in Genesis 2. First, in Genesis 2:18, "*Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'*" Then, it says the same thing down in Genesis 2:20. So, when it says in verse 20, "*there was not found a helper fit for [Adam,]*" the Bible says that's not good. Now, keep in mind, this is before sin even entered into the world. The end of chapter one, "*Behold, it was all very good,*" but what was not good was that man was alone, and he needed a helper that was suitable for him. So, this is the paradox we're seeing here in these two truths: man needed someone who was like him, made in the image of God, but also different from him to help him.

So, was woman equal to man? Yes and no. Yes, absolutely, in the sense of dignity and worth, but no, not equal in the sense of role because she was created with a different role...quite literally as a helpmate for man. Another way of putting this, man was created to exercise loving authority over woman while woman was created to extend glad submission to man. Now, as soon as I say that, I know that we're going against the grain of the culture, a culture that has convinced us that such statements are chauvinistic and dominating. Authority and submission are such negative words in our day. Our culture would have us believe that if we are submissive to someone else's authority that automatically implies that we are of less worth, but that's not true. This is equal worth and different roles in a way that's good for us and glorifying to God if we'll listen.

Now, some of you are thinking, "Are you sure about that?" So, I knew you'd be thinking that, and I listed eight realities from Genesis 2 that point to how God created man to be the head and a woman to be the helper. Some of them whisper male headship and authority; others of them shout it, and together, they give us a clear picture of this second truth: God created man and woman with different roles. Follow with me.

First, see the order of creation. Very simply, man was created first; then woman was created. Now, some may not think that's a huge deal, maybe just coincidence. One had to be created before the other, but that's not true. Obviously, Adam and Eve could have been created at the same time. In the creation of animals, which are male and female as well, you don't have this differentiation like we see in Genesis 2, but you do have a distinct order here. Then, two different times in the New Testament...1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11...Paul talks about, in 1 Timothy 2, leadership of men and women in the church, and he points to male leadership in the church and says, "*Adam was formed first, then Eve.*" 1 Corinthians 11, "*Man was not made for woman, but woman for man.*" The New Testament is saying this has importance. Man's creation was not just arbitrary. It wasn't God flipping a coin and saying, "Okay, we'll go with man first." There's significance here, the New Testament says.

Second, look at the design of creation. Look at how woman was created. God didn't immediately create woman here in Genesis 2. Instead, God parades all these animals in front of Adam to get him to name them. What's the point of all that? The point is to show, to make it clear that there's not one who was like him. So, he's left alone. Goes to sleep. God performs the first surgical operation. Man goes to sleep. While he's sleeping, God takes his rib from his side, a picture of how a woman would be in the very deepest sense of the word his partner, his helper, intentionally forming woman from man, and in a very real sense for man: Genesis 2:18...a helper fit for man.

Which then, leads, third, to the naming of woman. There she stands as he wakes up, formed by God, like man, uniquely suited for him. God touched him, wakes him up and says, "You have one more creature to name." Adam opens his eyes and, needless to say, he is thrilled. First words ever recorded of a human speaking, and it's poetry, it's like song. *"Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man,'" (Genesis 2:23)*. Oh, see the joy of the first man receiving the gift of the first woman. He goes nuts saying, "Yes! She's from me. My very flesh. I identify with her, and I love her, and I call her 'Whoa-man!'" She came out of man. So, he gives her this name, which in and of itself, is a picture of authority. So, you seeing here? Equals. Both human, but different. Woman taken from man, after man, named by man. Keep going.

Even in the naming of the human race, God named the human race "man," not "woman." See this in Genesis 1:27. *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."* "Him" represents "them." You get to Genesis 5, and you see, *"When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created."* If God was trying to be politically correct in the 21st Century, He certainly would not have done this, but apparently, He is not trying to be politically correct in the 21st Century. He's doing something intentional here.

Keep going here, and you think about the representation of man. You get to Romans 5 in the New Testament, and you see, *"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned..."* Now, in Genesis 3, sin came into the world through both Adam and Eve, but Adam...man...is recognized in Scripture as the representative of both Adam and Eve. You get to 1 Corinthians 15, the Bible says, in Adam, all of us have died in our sin, which then leads to another thing to consider: the responsibility of man.

Trivia question: in the Garden of Eden, in Genesis 3, who ate from the fruit of the tree first? Adam or Eve? Man or woman? Eve. Woman did. She ate, then he ate, but when you get to Genesis 3:8-9, and God confronts them in their sin, what happens? *"And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'"* Who did God address first after the fall? Not woman, who ate first, but man. Even though woman sinned first, God summoned man to give an account for what happened, showing that he had a responsibility for leadership in his relationship, which is why 1 Corinthians talks about *"in Adam all die."* Primary responsibility for sin put on the shoulders of man. Not in a way that woman is absolved, we'll talk about that, but in a way that man clearly has responsibility for the entrance of sin into his family.

As a result, see the effect of sin. You get to Genesis 3:16-19, and you see how God pronounces the effects of sin on man and woman, and how sin would affect the world and their relationships with one another. You look at that. Some have chosen to say, "Well, this is where headship and helping as roles were introduced into the relationship between man and woman, as a result of sin," but clearly, we've already seen, this was already in Genesis 2. This is not an introduction of new roles. Instead, we see the effect of sin was a distortion of previous roles. God says, as a result of sin, Genesis 3:16-19, male headship will lead to a man's desire to dominate his wife with his authority, and the role of the woman as helper will lead her to desire to usurp his authority. Both of those perversions of God's good design.

So, last thing I'll show you if you're not convinced yet: the redemption of sinners. Think about this with me. If male headship and female submission were products of the fall, evidence of sin, not God's design, then wouldn't we expect, in Christ, for everything to be made supposedly right, and man and woman would have equal roles in Christ? If that's the case, then why does the New Testament, in Christ, for followers of Christ who have been redeemed from sin, why does the New Testament still exhort husbands to lead their wives and wives to submit to their husbands? If such leadership and submission were a bad thing, then certainly, in Christ, that curse would be reversed, but it's not. In fact, this relationship of loving authority and humble submission is affirmed for Christians because this was the design of God before sin even came into the world.

You put all this together, and it's clear. Man created to be head in a way that woman was not. Woman created to be helper in a way that man was not. Man with loving authority over woman. Woman created with glad submission to man's authority. Now, as soon as that's established, we think, "Isn't that demeaning to women? Is that offensive to women?" It's not. Now, no sooner as I say that, some might think, "Well, of course it's not to you, you're a man. You're one of 'them.' Of course you would say that." This is where I want to show you the third truth, okay? I hope this will seal the deal in your heart and mind.

God created men and women with equal dignity, different roles, and God created men and women as a reflection of the Trinity, as a reflection of Himself. This is where we see the beauty of both our equality and our differences in God. God exists in three Persons. Genesis 1:26, "*Let us...*" The Bible clearly says there's one God: He is God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Mystery of the Trinity: one God, three persons. Now, think about the persons of the Trinity. They are equally divine. Is the Father God? Yes. Is the Son God? Yes, absolutely. Is the Spirit God? Without question. Equally divine. Equally worthy of praise and glory and adoration. None higher than the other in worth. I have listed...I listed verses here for each.

But at the same time, the persons of the Trinity are positionally different. They have different roles and even different authority. Follow with me here. All over Scripture...accepted all over Scripture. The Father has authority over the Son, right? The Father sends the Son into the world, John 4. The Son is obedient to the will of the Father. The Father has authority over the Son, and the Son is subject to the Father...always, just like we see in Philippians 2. The Son sits at the Father's right hand. The Father never sits at the Son's right hand, which is why...1 Corinthians 11:3, which we mentioned already...the Bible says "*the head of Christ is God.*" So, the Bible is teaching here that there is headship and submission in God.

Is that bad? Is that chauvinistic of the Father? Is that offensive to the Son? No, not at all. This is good. We are so programmed in our culture to think that authority is bad and domineering and submission is negative and makes one inferior, but that's not true. Just look at God. Authority in the Father; submission in the Son. Neither of them inferior or superior. Neither domineering or denigrated. Together as one, loving and leading. Oh, this is...this is loving authority in the Trinity, loving authority and glad submission in the context of beautiful relationship.

So, headship and submission. That very idea did not begin with chauvinistic man in the 20th Century. The ideas of headship and submission began...they've always...they never actually began. They've always been because God has always been, and it's always been good. Now, it's been distorted in all kinds of ways...been distorted, but God's original design is good, and the Son of God shows us that it's good. You look at John 5. Son shows us...the Son is

eternally subject to the Father, and His submission to the Father is good and lovely. One writer put it this way, based on the Trinity, God Himself:

We can say, then, that a relationship of authority and submission between equals with mutual giving of honor is the most fundamental and glorious interpersonal relationship in the whole universe. Such a relationship allows interpersonal differences without better or worse, without more important and less important. And when we begin to dislike the very idea of authority and submission, not distortions and abuses, but the very idea, we are tampering with something very deep. We are beginning to dislike God himself.

To resist the idea...to react negatively against the idea of authority and submission is to resist and react negatively against the very nature of God.

Three Initial Conclusions...

So, recap. Three initial foundations: God created men and women with equal dignity, different roles, as a reflection of the Trinity. That leads to three initial conclusions. Number one: all of this is good for us. It is very good. Genesis 1:31. Just as it's good for the Son. The Son never says to the Father, "This is not fair to me for you to be in charge simply because you're the Father." The Son never says to the Father, "You've been in charge for the last fifty billion years. Why don't you let me try it for the next fifty billion?" No, this is good. Delightfully expressed in God Himself and intended to be delightful for us, complementing one another. See the goodness of this! This is good for us.

Unity in diversity: we are attracted to one another by our differences. Men and women are different and that's good. Challenging at times, but good. It's good that they're not the same. Heather and I joke around the world all the time that, if we were both like me, we would be the most boring couple in the world. It's good to be equal and different. Unity in diversity, and that leads to equality amidst intimacy: we honor one another as we enjoy one another. We honor one another as equals and experience unity with one another through our differences. You think about Genesis 2:24 here. The union of man and woman as one flesh. Now, I know, it's kind of a foretaste of what's to come. We're going to talk about sex later, but you just think about the physical act of marriage: unity in diversity. We are most attracted to the parts of each other that are the most different, by God's design. Our deepest unity is found at the point where we are the most different. Are you following me here? Unity in diversity. Equality amidst intimacy. We honor one another as equals while we enjoy one another's differences. Glory to God!

You think about it. It's just getting better because what comes from this one-flesh act of union comes the most astounding physical event in all creation, the forming of a new human being in the image of God. Glory to God! This is good for us. It's glorifying to God. We reflect His character in this. We see in Psalm 121:1...my kids were memorizing this recently... *"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."* To realize that God is our Head, and God is our Helper. So, together, man and woman uniquely reflect the character of God, and we trust His Word. Again, we just come back to this over and over again. This is one of those areas where we're going to ask the question: are we going to trust His Word or are we going to trust a culture of feminism that says personal worth and personal role are inextricably linked together, and if you have different roles then, clearly, that means you are of less worth? Are we going to trust God who says that we all have personal worth? Made in His image, yet we have different roles, in a way that does not devalue worth in any way, but actually, exalts your worth. Who are we going to trust? Either the Word is our authority, or the culture is our authority.

Let's trust His Word. Let's reflect His character. Let's glorify God as men and women. All of this is good for us, glorifying to God, and it's the essence of the gospel. See this. The formation of man and woman in this way was not just happenstance or coincidence; this was purposeful. Ephesians 5 says God did this in this way...brought man and woman together in this way...to show the relationship between Christ and His church.

Our creation as man and woman is, ultimately, intended to illustrate how God would, one day, send Christ as our sacrificial groom. He would come in glad submission to the Father to die on the cross for our sins to save us and to make it possible for us to be His submissive bride, where we live to serve Him in glad submission. So, see this. Our creation...your creation as a man or as a woman...is part of an overarching drama unfolding on the pages of human history. We're part of something bigger. God has designed you as a man or you as a woman with different roles. As head or helper, with loving authority and glad submission, all to the end that Christ would be exalted as the head of the church, who gladly submits to His love. For that reason alone, don't limit these differences and roles. See what's at stake here. God has designed the headship of men and the help of women to display the glory of Christ in the salvation of the church. We want His glory to be clear.

Sin and Sexuality...

Now, obviously, sin breaks into that and affects the picture. I want us to look at this Fall story in Genesis 3 because every single detail is important, and I want you to see, tonight, how sin uniquely affected man and uniquely affected woman. That it wasn't just two generic people: it was a man and a woman in Genesis 3, and sin was intertwined with manhood and womanhood. Listen to this:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So 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. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Okay, let's think about sin's effect on men here, and I want you to see a passive picture and an active picture of sin, both of which are sinful. So, first, starting with man: we see him sinning passively through a spineless abdication of his responsibility. This is the essence of what Adam did in verses one through five. You look back at verses one through five, and you say, "Well, Adam didn't do anything in verses one through five." Exactly. Notice how the serpent, in the very way he tempts this couple, subverts the design of God. He comes to the woman, not to the man, subverting what God has designed, and from all we can tell, Adam is standing right there by her while Eve leads out. You see this importance when you get down to Genesis 3:17, and God says, "*Because you have listened to the voice of your wife...*"

God had given...you have Genesis 2:17 there...God had actually given the command not to eat from the tree in the Garden to Adam, before woman even came along. It had been

entrusted to the man, and now, in Genesis 3, he's forsaking his responsibility before God. He should have stood up and said, "Serpent, you have no business questioning my wife about the commands God has given to me. Those commands came to me; I'm responsible for faithfully carrying them out in my family." Instead, he sits silently by like a wimp. Then, when God confronts him in his sin, he has the audacity to say to God, "She did it."

Spineless abdication of responsibility. Alive and well, today, in men and husbands and dads who refuse to lead, who sit and watch TV and play video games and surf the internet instead of taking up responsibility for the spiritual well-being of their wives and their children. Males who think they are men, but in reality, are little boys, shirking their most important responsibility before God. Spineless abdication. So, see this: sin is not just disobedience to God. Yes, fundamentally that, but here in the man, spineless abdication of responsibility. Sin intricately connected to his manhood.

Now, a more aggressive dimension of that: selfish abuse of his authority. So, on the other end of the spectrum, in reaction, man will rise up and say, "Okay, I'm not going to be the wimp in this relationship. I'm going to dominate this relationship." So, you see in Genesis 3:16, God says to Eve, "*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.*" The word for "rule," there, literally means to assert by power or strength or force, sometimes used in the Old Testament in an oppressive way. So, Adam, in his manhood, would rule with a harshness and a forcefulness that is not the design of God, a picture of domination.

This is why I was careful, earlier, to say headship and authority is not the same as domination and force. Headship and authority in Genesis 2 is good, but in Genesis 3, as a result of sin, it becomes a picture of a selfish abuse of authority, that man will seek to control woman and abuse his position as authority in their relationship. You see both those pictures today, don't you? Passive abdication of responsibility. Aggressive abuse of authority.

As a result of the sin, man will experience pain in his role of breadwinning. You see that in Genesis 3:17-19, and God had given him the command to work the ground and care for it, and that's where the payment of his sin hits. So, see this. This is gender-specific punishment for sin. So, that's sin's effect on man.

What about woman? Again, both passive and aggressive. On one hand, in Genesis 3, you see spineless dismissal of any responsibility. Don't miss the picture here. It's not that woman wasn't responsible in Genesis 3 for sin. Man, certainly, had an ultimate level of accountability and responsibility. When you see this picture of womanhood, particularly when it comes to submission, sin distorts this role and causes some women to think, "Okay, then. If I'm the helper, he's the head, then I'm not accountable for what I do. I'm just the helper." Maybe a woman sees her husband or children doing something wrong, and she doesn't do anything about it. Or maybe her husband is sinning against her, abusing her, and she sits idly by thinking, "Well, this is what submission is about." That is a tragic distortion of biblical womanhood. God did not create any woman to be a doormat, and God holds women responsible for the way they think, they live, the choices they make, the way they use their bodies and present their bodies.

So, there's a path of distortion of womanhood here, dismissing responsibility, and then more prevalently in Genesis 3, selfish defiance against authority—an aggressive picture of sin. When Genesis 3:16 says, "*Your desire shall be for your husband,*" you think, "Well, what's wrong with that?" Well, actually, you get to Genesis 4:7, and you see the Bible talk about sin crouching at the door, and "*its desire is for you.*" It's the same word that's used in

Genesis 3 there, and we realize this word for desire is, literally, a word that...just like sin desires you in a bad way, in a way that wants to oppose you, in a way that wants to work against you, the picture is that woman, as a result of sin, has a tendency to work against man's leadership, to want to oppose man's leadership. Your desire will be to rebel against him, to overpower him, to usurp his rule in your life, so that you have a picture of the total opposite of what we just talked about. Instead of dismissing responsibility, usurping responsibility. Woman defying authority and saying, "I'm going to do this my own way, my rule, regardless of what my husband says or does. I'm in charge here, not him." Sinful perversion of God's design.

As a result of sin, woman will experience pain in her role of childbearing. That's the specific...gender-specific...punishment for sin that you see. So, you put all this together, and you realize how much manhood and womanhood is intertwined with sin, how sin is expressed in different ways among men and women, and you see that the work of Satan in Genesis 3 was, in a very real sense, a foundational attack on God's design for men and women. You can just imagine Satan laughing in Genesis 3 saying, "Now, I've created confusion that they will never be able to sort out. They'll look at aggressive men, and they'll say, 'You need to be more passive.' They'll look at passive women and say, 'You need to be more aggressive. They'll go back and forth between these assertions and never get it right. It's a mess." It's all over our lives, our families, and our culture.

Salvation and Sexuality...

So, what do we do? We look to Christ, and I want you to see that, in Christ...in Christ alone...God's design for manhood and womanhood can be restored. Salvation and sexuality are by God's grace. Don't miss His mercy in Genesis 3. Despite the sin of men and women, God seeks the guilty. In Genesis 3:8-9, He comes to them. God covers the shameful, provides a covering for the shame of their sin. God protects the fearful: makes a way for man and woman who deserve death to live, Genesis 3:22-24, and, in the middle of it all, God promises the Savior. Right in the middle, we have Genesis 3:15. Right in the middle of one of the worst...probably, the worst chapter in the entire Bible...we have the greatest promise in the entire world. God says, "I will send one from the seed of woman who will overcome the serpent." God promises that Satan will be trampled, and Christ will triumph, which leads to an astounding turn of events: Adam names his wife "Eve." So, they've just seen death come into the world, and he names her "*mother of all the living*," (Genesis 3:20). That's the grace of God. So, this is the picture of the gospel applied in Genesis 3.

So, how should we respond to this as men and women? Based on all we've seen, man's responsibility, then, in Christ is clear. Man's primary responsibility is to lead. Just like we saw in 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5, head of man is Christ. Head of wife is her husband. Husband is the head of wife even as Christ is the head of the church. God has entrusted man with this primary role...not sole, we'll get to that...but primary responsibility to lead for the good of woman. This was good in Genesis 1 and 2. Very good. Not just for man but for woman. This is not leadership for the sake of self-appeasement or self-satisfaction. This is leadership for the good of others.

Christ is our leader, right? He is good. We don't begrudgingly submit to Him. He is a good leader. We want to submit to Him, and that's the way God has designed manhood, so that men live in a way that is worthy of glad submission. You say, "Well, what if...what about men who are abusive to women or domineering over women?" That's not God's design. There's a manual on church discipline from the second century that says, "If there is a man who is abusing his wife in the church, the pastor should take two stout elders and visit that home." Take that brother out back with some stout elders and have a talk about manhood.

That's what you do. This is good. It's for the good of woman and for the glory of Christ, meaning, man realizes he has a leader, but he's also under authority.

Man is not the ultimate leader: Christ is the ultimate leader, and man leads in a way that reflects the loving authority of Christ. Man's primary responsibility is to lead, and man is accountable to God for two things, mainly here, based on what we've seen. One, man is accountable to God for protection of his wife. Clearly, he is held accountable in Genesis 3 for not protecting his wife from the Adversary.

This is...this is something that I wish I had put in the notes here, but this is...yes, protection of his wife is most evident in the marriage relationship, but there is a sense in which man is accountable to God for the protection of women, not just one's wife. Certainly, any man is accountable for the specific protection of his wife, but part of manhood, by God's design, is an inclination, a desire to protect women in general. We know this. When two guys and two ladies are walking down the street, and an attacker approaches the group, there's something wrong if the two guys step back and push the two ladies forward to defend them. Boys, not men. That's not God's design. We know this. Any husband who rolls over in bed at night to his wife, wakes her up and says, "Honey, there's a strange noise downstairs. Would you go check it out?" Not a man! Outside of the design of God!

Man is accountable to God for the protection of his wife and for provision in the home. When God doles out a punishment upon man for sin, He directly addresses this responsibility that man has for his home, that man has primary responsibility. This is not...this is not saying...Genesis 3 is not mandating that a woman never work outside of the home, anything like that, but the picture is that a man still has a responsibility to provide for his family, and there are, obviously, circumstances in which a man may be disabled or paralyzed or in some way unable to provide in that way, but that desire is in him to work to provide for his home. So, that's man's response to Christ and the gospel.

Woman's response to the gospel in God's design. Notice here, by design this is complementary. Neither of these is intended to stand alone. So, where man's primary responsibility is to lead, woman's primary responsibility is to support. She's a helper by God's design in Genesis 2, and she's not devalued by that, but she's honored by that in the way that the Son is honored before the Father.

So, she supports through a humble disposition that yields to man's leadership. Every word there is key. The reason I've put disposition there is because I know there are so many different circumstances represented in the lives all across the place tonight. This is what makes this issue difficult to apply, because there are women who are single, there are women who are widowed, women who are divorced, women who are married to non-Christian men, women who are married to men that claim to be Christians but abdicate their responsibility to lead, women who are married to men who are honoring Christ, laying down their lives for them. Which, on a side note, I have never met a woman who has a husband who displays godly, loving leadership for her and protects and provides well for her...a woman who, in that situation, is not happy.

This is a good design from God. The problem is, oftentimes, that's not the case. So, I put disposition there to emphasize that a woman is designed by God to be inclined toward yielding to man's leadership. She wants to...desires a man who exercises loving authority, leadership...that protects and provides for her. God's design is for women to desire this, not to rebel against this. Not to rebel against man's good, loving, authoritative leadership. It reflects Christ's good, loving, authoritative leadership. So, humble disposition that yields to man's leadership, with ultimate devotion to following Christ's leadership. This is key,

because, like we talked about, a husband is head of the wife, but not the ultimate head because Christ is the head of the husband. Christ is the head of all of us, so biblical womanhood is not saying, "Whatever my husband tells me to do, I'll do it no matter what he says." Biblical womanhood has a discerning spirit that is inclined to submit to her husband but is further inclined to submit to Christ. If her husband wants her to do something that goes directly against the Word of Christ, then she will yield to Christ over him. So, biblical womanhood is not leaving your brain or your will at the door of marriage, putting the will of your husband before the will of Christ.

I'll give you an example. Precious sister from this church...her husband not a believer. She loves her husband. She longs for her husband to come to Christ, and she submits to her husband...humble disposition to yield all over her demeanor in the way she talks to her husband, the way she talks about her husband, but they've come to matters where she has seen in the Word, commands from Christ that go against ways her husband is leading her, and so she has said to him, "I want to submit to you." This gentle, quiet spirit: "I want to submit to you, but I cannot disobey the Word of Christ." She's modeling 1 Peter 3:1-2. *"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, when they see your respectful and pure conduct."* I'm praying that he will come to Christ through her testimony, through her Christ-like, humble disposition to yield, and her ultimate devotion to following Christ.

Woman's primary responsibility is to support, and she is accountable to God for affirmation of her husband. Basically, affirmation of her husband's role. "Yes, I am a helper suitable for you. Designed by God in a complementary, not competitive, relationship with you, and there are things you need in me, and I affirm my need for your leadership." Then, woman is accountable to God for nurture in the home. She alone is equipped by God to bear children, and then, with gifts, to nurture children in a way that complements man's leadership of children. He protects and provides; she affirms and nurtures. Complementary picture. This is the design of God.

Applying the Gospel to Our Sexuality...

So, how does this play out in our lives? Again, every circumstance in this room is so different. There are so many different situations represented in this room. I want you to think about your life though. I don't want you to think, "Well, I could be the kind of woman that God has designed me to be if my husband would do this." Or "I could be the kind of man if my wife would do this." Or "I could be the kind of single man I'm supposed to be if all the single women around would start doing something different." Or vice versa, probably more likely, vice versa.

So, I want you to think about your life right now, and I want to speak to men. Just two exhortations. Number one: based on all we've seen, men, initiate humble, hard-working leadership. Initiate. This is leadership, not passivity, sitting back doing nothing. Work, men. Work hard. God made you to work for the good of woman and the glory of His name. Work at leadership. Husbands, do not wait for your wife to step up and lead. It is your responsibility to lead. Single guys, do not wait for some girl to ask you out. It's your responsibility to lead, and if she rejects you, make it as easy as possible for her to reject you. Don't make that hard on her. You humbly bow out. Humble, hard-working leadership is part of biblical manhood. "America's greatest need," James Dobson says, "is in addressing this issue." So lead.

Take the initiative in spiritual devotion. Husbands, is your wife flourishing in her relationship with Christ? Are your children flourishing in their relationship with Christ? Take the initiative

in marital duties or potential marital duties. Don't wait for your wife to come to you and say, "There's some problems in our marriage that we need to talk about." You initiate that conversation. Turn off the TV. Stop hiding on the ball field or behind your computer and ask your wife how you can love her better. That's your responsibility, and she will love you for it. Consistently, periodically sit down with her and say...like I said to Heather, not long ago, and really...I promise it wasn't like for an illustration of this. We're just laying there the other night, and I said, "Babe, how can I love you better?" She gets two or three things right off the top of her head, a surprisingly easy exercise for my wife. So, this is good. This is good. So, married men.

Then, single guys...potential marital duties...single guys, grow up and get ready for a wife. Move Halo and Xbox and PlayStation down your list of priorities and start working your tail off to the glory of God. Work hard: school, job, whatever it is the Lord has called you to, commit yourself to it. Resist the ever-present trend in our culture to prolong adolescence into your twenties and thirties. Grow up. Man up. Take responsibility, and before you start thinking about taking a wife, figure out where you're going to take her. Then, take the initiative.

There are godly girls all over Brook Hills. This is an announcement to 50,000 people, some of whom are single guys. We have godly girls all over this church who are waiting for some boys to step it up and be men, and they're filling in where boys are slacking off. We've got women who are going to some of the most dangerous places in the world that men won't even think about going to. We work a lot with the International Mission Board. They have a journeymen program that involves sending people...college graduates...overseas for about two years, and one of the leaders there was commenting that probably one of the toughest places to send people is parts of West Africa. Rugged, not easy to live, not safe to share the gospel; difficult area. This leader said that, out of 50 journeymen going to that area, 48 of them were girls.

Brothers, man up. Initiate humble, hard-working leadership in spiritual devotion; in marital duties...potential marital duties; in parental discipline. God, raise up men who don't stand passively by while kids talk back to their wives. Raise up men who will be obedient to Ephesians 6. Leadership in essential decisions. It's not that a man is supposed to make every decision for his wife or family, but he will feel the burden for overarching responsibility for decision-making, that his family will look to him for leadership in that way. It won't be perfect all the time, obviously, but he works hard to make wise decisions, and amidst inevitable disagreements, that he bears the responsibility for making sure those are worked out.

This is not easy, brothers. We cannot do this on our own, which is why Scripture calls us to look to Christ, and by the grace of Christ, lay down your life to honor women. Honor your wife, 1 Peter 3:7; honor women. They're not perfect, but that's the beauty of what Adam did in Genesis 3:20, right? Right after she eats the fruit and they sinned, he doesn't begrudge her. He doesn't run from his wife, hate her, treat her harshly; instead, he treats her graciously. He doesn't belittle her, remind her of her faults. He doesn't dwell upon her failures. He shows her the same grace that he has been shown, and he lifts her up in honor as life-giving Eve. Honor women.

Single guys, honor women in the same way, and then manhood means that, by the grace of Christ, we lay down our lives to train boys to be men. Dads, husbands, single men, let's show boys what godly responsibility, humble initiative, hard-working leadership looks like in action. Young single men, as long as you prolong adolescence into your twenties and thirties, you will teach teenage boys that they need not grow up because your life looks just

theirs. So, train boys to provide, to protect, to lead women in loving, gracious, humble, hard-working ways that reflect the character of Christ.

Then, women, incline yourself toward wise, willing submission. Remember, a disposition that is inclined to submit in ways that are wise, obviously, not foolish. So, you need not submit to a man who is abusing you. You take that to the church and have them go out back. Incline yourself, first and foremost, to wise and willing submission to God in constant prayer, especially if you're in a difficult situation tonight, sisters. Go to Him. Don't give up, thinking that He's not listening. He always hears your prayers. He is with you. He promises to give you the strength and sustenance you need to carry out His design.

Then, to wise and willing submission to men in certain positions. Obviously, if you're a wife, to your husband in a way that honors Christ, even if he's not a believer, just like we saw. I know there are single women across this room; some single moms. Look in the church for healthy relationships with men who can help protect and provide for you. I love the picture of small groups in the church that are compensating for lack of men in many different families and saying, "We want to make sure that wives are cared for and children are provided for." Incline yourself toward wise, willing submission to men whom God has placed in your life or in the church for your good and for the glory of Christ.

For the glory of Christ, live in a way that demonstrates godly respect for men. Respect your husbands, Ephesians 5 says. Desire and receive good, godly, humble male leadership, and live in a way that shows girls how to be women. Show girls what a godly inclination to follow a man's leadership looks like in action. Show girls how to submit to a man, to a husband, as the church submits to Christ. Teach them to look for men who display the character of Christ. Teach them to guard their heart. Don't flaunt. Girls around encourage them to give their heart to whatever new guy comes their way. That's not biblical womanhood: that's divorce practice. Dads, keep her under your protection, and moms keep her under your nurture until a man is able to come and show you that he will provide for her and protect her and love her and lead her for her good and for the glory of Christ.

There's so much at stake here, isn't there? Let's be honest. None of us is perfect in all of this. The last thing I want to do is communicate that I am perfect in all these ways, that I don't have struggles with being the man that God desires me to be, but this is our hope as men and women saved by the gospel of Christ: because of the gospel, we can look forward to the day when our lives will be redeemed, when Christ by His grace will fully make us into the men and the women, perfectly, that He has designed us to be before Him and each other. Therefore, we can look forward to the day when our relationships will be made right with each other as men and women who complement one another, and, together, display the full image of God as male and female. It's what the gospel creates. This is the reality; it's a glorious reality. Jesus didn't just die to make us the people He created us to be. Jesus died to make us the men and women He created us to be.

GOD'S DESIGN

The Gospel and Marriage

That's the gospel and sexuality, which leads right into the gospel and marriage...right into the gospel and marriage. Okay, keep going. Here we go. You know, I'm going to share this real quick. Real quick. Some of you have heard...Brook Hills folks have heard this. I just want to make sure that you know my authority is in the Word, not in my own personal words.

So, my wife and I...she was the only girl I ever dated, which sounds noble until you realize that I was just extremely socially awkward as a kid, and God provided a woman who, by His grace, would actually talk to me. So, when she started talking to me, I thought I needed to hold onto her, and so...but then, she went off to college after we had started just to become friends, and so I thought, "Oh no, what am I going to do?" So, recently we celebrated our anniversary, and she gave me a scrapbook with some letters that I had written to her. I'm going to share just a little short portion of a letter that I wrote to her. I'm going to risk any semblance of a reputation that I might have. So she had just moved off to college, and this is what I wrote: "Dear Heather, Dude, I am so glad you called tonight."

What kind of opening is that? Like, you think through ever word you're going to put on a piece of paper like this. What possessed me to think that "dude" would be a great opening? I'm not making this up. I wish I was making this up, but this is not made up.

"Dude, I am so glad you called tonight." Apparently, we had just talked, so I said, "I have wanted to call you Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and today, but I just figured you were too busy." You don't say that. You don't say that. You say, "Oh, I've been so busy..." But apparently, I was not. I continue, "When I heard your voice, it was so awesome that I can't explain how I felt. You sounded so awesome." Is this not lame?

Oh, all right, we're going to the end. That's enough from the beginning. So, this is...this was my rousing conclusion. So, this is how I close: Dude, I'm not just wasting ink when I say this." I'm not wasting ink! Wasting ink? "My life isn't the same without you around, and I miss having you to talk to and spend time with. I miss you something fierce. Praying for you, dude. In Christ, David."

No. No. Why are you clapping? Why are you clapping? You're clapping because you feel better about yourself that you did not write that, but, maybe, you're clapping for my precious wife over here, I hope. "Man, she must be quite a woman to marry that guy." Maybe, you're just clapping in worship like, "God, only you could have brought this man marriage." So, I don't have a lot of credibility to talk about love and marriage, but Word credibility. Okay?

So, here's the deal. Obviously, Old Testament foundation for marriage is Genesis 2:24. We've looked at before. Then, Ephesians 5:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 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. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore [it quotes from Genesis 2] a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Okay, I've divided this section into gospel foundations, gospel instructions and gospel exhortations, and all of them...we're going to fly through this, because it just flows from what we've already seen in Genesis 1-3.

Gospel Foundations...

Gospel foundations. Number one: the glory of God is the ultimate aim of marriage. This is the picture of marriage: "*Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!*" (Psalm 34:3). That's the verse that we had at our wedding that's just been central in our hearts and minds in marriage. So, marriage exists for the glory of God in Christ. To put this another way, marriage exists for God more than it exists for you. This is key, utterly foundational. As long as you approach marriage out of the mindset of what is best for me, then you've missed the point.

The ultimate starting point of marriage is not, "What is best for me?" It's, "What is best for God?" When we ask that question, we realize that what is best for God is best for us. This is huge. This is so important because we run...in our culture here at least...to all kinds of Christian bookstores, and we get all kinds of marriage books and try to listen to experts on marriage. The only problem is we're bypassing the one expert who created marriage.

The most foundational, significant question in your marriage is this: Is Jesus the Lord of your life? We will do everything we can to bypass that question, because the greatest thing, husband, you can give to your wife is likeness to Christ. The greatest thing, wife, you can give to your husband is likeness to Christ. You get to Luke 14:25-27, and Jesus says, "*If anyone comes to me and does to hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*" What's that about? Well, be sure, this text is not about marital abandonment. This text is not saying, "Husbands, leave your wives." This text is about superior affection. Love for Christ should drive marriage, and love for the glory of God in Christ.

Second foundation: the grace of God is the ultimate hope for marriage. This is good news. God has not left you alone in marriage. God, who designed marriage, has promised His grace to experience it as He designed it. You say, "Well, then, why do many marriages struggle?" Experts point to all kinds of different problems, and I don't want to claim to be overly simplistic here, but the major problem with every marriage is sin. The major problem in every marriage represented, tonight, is that every husband and wife is a sinner, a horrible sinner at that, and it makes simple sense, but we overlook it.

I mean, how many wives lean over to their husbands on their honeymoon night and say, "I'm a really big sinner, and I am now yours for life." That doesn't get the romance going, but it's true. "*Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.*"

Romans 3:10-18 is not...those lyrics don't make for a good wedding song. "Let's pause while we reflect on the depravity of this man and this woman," but, this is important.

This is important, because marriage is going to be hard when you have two sinners involved, which means the major solution for any marriage is a Savior. We need the gospel to infiltrate our marriages on a daily basis. We are driven to Christ, and Christ is better than all the experts. Christ and His Word are better than all the books in the Christian bookstore put together. So, make sure to go to Christ and His Word. Grace of God...ultimate hope for marriage, and the gospel of God is the ultimate picture in marriage. All throughout Scripture, you see it listed here, God described Himself as a husband, and His people as a bride. We've already read in Ephesians 5, wives give a picture of the church to the world, and husbands give a picture of Christ to the world. Oh, that is so huge.

This is both challenging and encouraging. It's challenging, wives, if you sleep around on your husband, you show the world that Christ is not satisfying enough for His people. Wives, if you disrespect your husband, you show the world that the church has no respect for Christ, but wives, if you follow your husband, you show that Christ is worth following. Husbands, if you leave your wife, you show that Christ deserts His people. If you're harsh with your wife, you show that Christ is harsh toward His people. If you ignore your wife, you show that Christ wants nothing to do with His people. That's challenging.

This is huge, but it's also encouraging because husbands, you have an expert in Christ who knows how to love a bride. So, go to Him, and women, wives, you have a picture of the church in glad submission that's intended for your marriage. So, gospel intended to be displayed.

Gospel Instructions...

So, roles and responsibilities, just like we've talked about. Roles...keep in mind...not arbitrary. The way God has designed: as Christ relates to the church, the husband is the head of the wife. Just as we've talked about, this word "head" and how it's used in Scripture, I've got listed there. So, as Christ relates to the church, the husband is the head of the wife, and as the church relates to Christ, the wife is the helper for her husband, Genesis 2, Ephesians 5. So, those are the roles.

Now, think about the responsibilities. The responsibilities for a wife in Proverbs 31:10-31 are illustrated so beautifully. Wives, revere Christ through submission to your husband. *"Submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord,"* (Colossians 3:18). It's all over the Scriptures. "Submit" means to yield to another in love. Revere Christ through submission to your husband and respect your husband. *"...Let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband,"* (Ephesians 5:33). This is very interesting here. See the wisdom of God here. We're about to talk about how the husband's responsibility...husband is commanded to love his wife. The wife is commanded to respect her husband.

Oh, there's so much to explore here, but don't miss this. Women have a need to be loved in a way that men have a need to be respected. Think about it. Women sometimes find it's more easy to love their husbands than respect them. A woman can get together with a group of other women, speak about her husband disrespectfully, and then go home and cook a meal for him and care for his needs because she loves him. The question is, does she respect him? We've got to be careful to give each other what we need. When a wife is trying to work on a troubled marriage, she tries to tell her husband that she loves him; she's saying what she'd like to hear. The question is, does she respect her husband, and does she tell him that she respects him? Wives may think, "Well, I don't think my husband works

hard enough to be worthy of respect," and as soon as we think like that, we're thinking like the world. That's not biblical, and it's not gospel. Your respect for your husband is not based on his performance but is based on God's call and command in your life as his wife. Revere Christ through submission to your husbands. Respect them. Honor them. Build them up. That's God's responsibility for wives.

When you look at Ephesians 5, there's a whole lot more responsibility addressed to the husbands here. Husband's responsibilities? Head of his wife. As head, reflect Christ through sacrifice for your wife. The thought of headship in marriage should cause every man in this room to tremble, and the last thing any husband should do is joke about being head of his wife. You're head in the sense that you lay down your life for her, in the same way that Christ laid down His life on a cross.

Love. The command God gives for a husband is to love your wife, not just to respect her. I mean, one night with the kids alone teaches me respect for my wife, but she needs love from me. Yes, respect. It's not that respect is bad, but she needs love. So, how do we love our wives? The Bible says we love her selflessly, like Christ's love...self-sacrificing love. You say, "Well, she doesn't do this or that for me." Again, that's the way the world thinks, not the way gospel transforms you to think.

The world says, "Love your wife because of all these positive characteristics she has. Love your wife because she deserves it." That's fickle love because, as soon as some characteristic in your wife is no longer as appealing as it once was, then your love disappears and fades away. Husbands, you love your wife, not because of who she is, but because of who Christ is. World tells you to be macho, defend yourself, assert yourself. The Bible's saying, in marriage, you die to yourself. Give yourself up. Love her selflessly. Love her effectively. Present her pure, holy. This is the picture, what Christ does in the church. Obviously, we're not the same in the sense that we don't redeem people, but the picture is husbands are responsible for leading marriages to be holy.

Husbands are responsible for leading wives to be lovely, not in a domineering way of course, but in a self-sacrificing way. Let me illustrate this. If your wife is not growing in loveliness, husbands, this is your responsibility. If your wife is struggling in sin, this is your responsibility.

Illustration: Imagine a Navy ship in the middle of the night. A young sailor rebelliously runs the ship into the ground. The captain of the ship is sleeping on his watch. Is the sailor guilty? Yes. Is the captain responsible? Absolutely. We're responsible for leading our wives to be lovely and our marriages to be holy. That's our responsibility as head.

Love her effectively; love her carefully. "*In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself,*" (Ephesians 5:28-31). Like your own body...I love this. Paul just appeals to man's selfishness. Men, you know how much you care about yourself? Well, care for her like that. Nourish her. The language here is emotional, even evocative. Nourish her and cherish her. Literally, the word is "to comfort, to keep warm." Don't be harsh with your wife. Never be harsh with your wife. Love her carefully. Use your position to treasure her, not debase her, and love her completely, 1 Corinthians 13, in every way, as yourself.

Gospel Exhortations...

So, this is where the encouragement would come, then, for husbands and wives and for future husbands and wives in this room. One: husbands, out-serve your wife. This is God's command for your life. It is a great calling. Marriage is not about you. It's about what's best

for your wife and for God's glory. The greatest husband is the greatest servant, Mark 10:45. Out-serve your wife, and wives, observe your husband's leadership. In other words, notice and affirm and respect their leadership. Now, as soon as I say that, I can read minds all across the place. People are thinking, "Well, that's the problem. My husband is not leading." This is where I remind you that this is based on Christ in you, not husband's performance. So, encourage him, but humbly encourage him.

I want to caution you not to demand that your husband take the leadership that we've seen in the Word, tonight, because as soon as you start demanding, you're quickly moving out of the role that God's entrusted to you. Any desire that he has to lead more will be squelched because it won't feel like he's leading any more; it'll feel like he's acquiescing to your demands. So pray. Pray, and then look for opportunities as you pray to encourage him, to respect, to observe the ways he is leading, and encourage him. Honor him in the way that he does, and the prayer that he would continue to do.

Finally, to husbands and wives, let Christ serve you. The point of Ephesians 5 is to overwhelm us to the point where we are driven to Christ, and I just want to say this closing out here, because the whole context in Ephesians, the whole book is about God bringing Jews and Gentiles together as one. I know there are some difficult, dark marriage situations represented across the place, tonight, and I want to remind you, that no one is beyond the power of God to save, and no marriage is beyond the power of God to save. So, fight for this, for your good, for God's glory and for the spread of the gospel of Christ in our marriages.

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