

THE GLORIOUS ROLE OF A CHRIST-EXALTING WIFE

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had a situation where someone promised you something but realized you were being conned? Several years ago Becky and I went to hear a presentation about buying a vacation package. By simply attending, we were guaranteed a prize. They showed us videos of beautiful places and colorful brochures of exotic resorts. When the salesman found out I was a pastor, he said his uncle had been pastor; so he understood the stresses of being a pastor and that it would be nice to get away to a relaxing vacation. After all, a rested pastor would be able to better serve his flock. Everything we were told sounded amazing, so amazing that it sounded too good to be true. We had the distinct impression we were being conned: purposely told lies just to rip us off. So I googled up the company and sure enough there were red flag warnings about these people. We walked out of there a little wiser and with all our money intact.

Ladies, I give that illustration because the world is attempting to pull a con on you regarding your role as a Christ-exalting wife. Our culture induces women to leave the priorities God has for them for something better. But it is all a lie. Because the world is misleading you, you must go to God. What does the Bible say? What we will see is that you have the amazing opportunity to glorify the Lord Jesus in your role as a wife. I have titled this: The Glorious Role of a Christ-Exalting Wife. We are going to look at four biblical essentials from Scripture that enable you to carry out your role as a Christ-exalting wife: understand your purpose; know your design; carry out your position; have the right perspective.

A. First, to be a Christ-exalting wife: **You must understand God's *purpose* for your marriage.** What does God want to accomplish through your marriage? Paul reveals God designed marriage to reflect one of the most glorious truths about himself: his unconditional, eternal love for sinners seen in Jesus giving up his life for his bride. Marriage is for the glory of Christ. It is to picture

the greatest love story ever told (**Eph 5:31-32**). Paul is quoting Genesis 2, where God performed the first marriage. When God created marriage, the purpose of marriage was to display a greater reality: the love of Jesus for his bride. Jesus left his Father in heaven and came to earth for his bride. He came to rescue her (**Eph 5:23b**). Jesus came to save his bride, which he did by dying in her place (**Eph 5:25b**). Jesus died for his bride so she could live. Marriage is meant to be the most faithful reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church. This is the deepest meaning of marriage.

There is no other human relationship like this on earth that pictures the gospel, which is why God says that marriage is to be held in honor by all. Your marriage is to picture this greater reality of Christ's love for his bride and her response. This takes your marriage to a higher level. As a husband and wife, you should live in such a way that Christ is put on display, which means it is no small matter how you relate to one another. You are to learn how to live as one flesh. One flesh is working together in harmony as the wife and husband carry out their God-given roles: the husband leading, the wife helping so what is put on display is Christ and the gospel.

So wives, Paul compares your role to the church and the husband's role to Christ. In the church, these roles are not confused. Jesus is the head; we submit to him. So if your marriage is to reflect the gospel, then you must live out your role as God intended. And when you do, it beautifully points to the glorious union between Christ and his bride. Now since this is true, the role of a wife takes on great significance because it pictures the church and how she relates to Christ. So as we look at the role of the wife, this is really a portrait of how a Christian relates to Jesus. So this will be helpful for all of us. Wives, you have an incredible opportunity to show those around you how a Christian relates to Jesus simply by how you relate to your husband, whether he is saved or not. You are an ambassador for Christ. You represent someone greater. Ladies, your role is greater than your marriage. When you live out your role, you reveal the gospel to your husband, to your kids, and to others around you. This is the grand purpose of marriage. So understand your purpose: you are doing this for Jesus' honor.

With this as our foundation, let's look more closely at the glorious role of a Christ-exalting wife (**Eph 5:22-24, 33b**). Paul shows how a husband and wife are to relate to one another by carrying out their specific roles. He distinctly states what the husband's role is. He is the *head*, which is why the wife is to submit to him. What is interesting is that Paul does not specifically say what the wife's role is. He simply states *how* she is to carry out her role—respectfully submit. If we want to understand *what* her role is, we must go back to Genesis 2, which describes the first marriage. Second:

B. To live out the glorious role of a Christ-exalting wife, you must: **Know your design.** God created or designed women in a specific way (**Gen 2:18**). In this verse we have a description of the first woman. The purpose of God creating her was to make her a helper suitable for her husband.

1. The beauty of womanhood and what it means to be feminine is found in the word *helper*. What is being described is not simply a wife but what it means to be a woman; what it means to be feminine. This applies to all women—those single and married. Womanhood is beautifully pictured in the word *helper*. A helper is one who comes to the aid of another. It is one who assists another in a task. God created the woman to assist the man and help him accomplish his work. Paul told the Corinthians, “Man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake” (1 Cor 11:9). The woman was designed by God to be the man's helper. This design is built into her DNA. Constitutionally, this is how God created women and it was purposeful design. When people design things, it is always intended for a specific purpose. A chair is designed to sit on. You may use a chair for any number of things, including something to stand on, but it is designed to sit in. Some things are purposely designed to go with something else. A pencil is designed to be used with paper. They always go together. Man was created by God in his image to rule and subdue the earth. This was his specific design. The woman was created by God in his image to help the man accomplish his job. This was her specific design. The man had a big job; he needed help! It was not good for him to be alone. He is going to hurt himself! He needed help. The woman finds her fulfillment in helping the man do his job of

ruling and subduing. This is her assignment from God. She is not in competition with the man; she is his support and encouragement. She complements him perfectly. They go together.

Ladies, since God created you a certain way, if you do not follow your intended design, the result will be frustration or worse. A few years ago instant pots (pressure cookers) became popular because it allows you to cook a meal in a fraction of the time. However, some people attempted to use them without following the directions; the results were not pretty: explosions and burns! If you do not live out your role as God intended, the results are not pretty. We have witnessed this in our society in the destruction of so many marriages or marriages where the husband and wife have learned to simply tolerate each other. But when you live the way God designed you, you find joy and satisfaction because you are living as God designed you, which glorifies him.

God created the man as the woman's head. The woman was designed by God to affirm the man's headship and leadership by submitting to him, but also to nurture and strengthen the resources of his masculinity.¹ In other words, ladies, you are not simply to receive and put yourself under him, you are his helper. You are to nurture and strengthen him where he might be weak. The woman by God's good design has the necessary ability, fitness, resources, and strength to be a help.² This is how God designed her, and such tendencies from that point on were built into all women.³ This is the beauty of femininity, for this is how God designed women.

2. The woman is a *suitable* helper (Gen 2:18). Man needed a helper suitable for him. Animals could be a help to man, but only at an animal's level. We used to have a cat and she was a good mouser. She kept the mouse population down and was a help at that level. Adam needed a helper corresponding to him, someone like him. Eve alone, out of all of God's creation, was fit for Adam. God created her so man could find companionship on his own level with one his equal. So *suitable* clearly

¹ John Piper, *What's the Difference?* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1990), 56.

² Alexander Strauch, *Men and Women Equal Yet Different* (Littleton, Colorado: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1999), 29.

³ John MacArthur, *Different By Design: Discovering God's Will for Today's Man and Woman* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1994), 141.

expresses equality. But this word also emphasizes she is different from man. She is corresponding to him, fit for him; not exactly like him. The man and the woman are different in some respects but they fit together perfectly. She completes the man. At every point the man lacked, was the woman's strength. And at every point the woman lacked, was the man's strength. What is emphasized is that God purposely designed men to be weaker in some ways and women to be weaker in other ways. But God intends that the weaknesses that we have by virtue of our sexuality call forth and highlight the strengths of the opposite sex. Thus the man and the woman complement each other perfectly. They are suitable for each other. What a wise God to design us this way! We need to understand:

3. There is glory in being a helper. Some may think: I do not see how this is an exalted role. He gets to call all the shots and I am just his helper? This does not seem too glamorous. Many think being a helper means you are second class; it is demeaning; you are of lesser value. But this is not what God says. God created a wife to be her husband's helper, but she is not simply helping a *man*. She is doing the work of God her Father and glorifying Christ her Savior. She submits "as to the Lord." This is for Jesus. There should be a sense of joy, delight, and satisfaction in being a helper.

But also understand that being a helper is an exalted role because it reflects God himself. God is our helper. "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Ps 121:1-2). God has no problem being identified as your helper. The Holy Spirit is called your Helper, who comforts, encourages, and comes alongside you. The work of the Holy Spirit, the Helper, is beautiful. And women are never more lovely than when they follow his example, cherishing their responsibility as helpers.⁴ There is beauty and satisfaction in God's design. Ladies, he designed you to be a helper to your husband.

So consider ways you can help him. If you are supposed to be his helper, then have a passion for what your husband is doing. Make him a priority. Ask him what his goals are and how you can help

⁴ Barbara Hughes, "A Wife's Responsibility to Help Her Husband," in *Becoming God's True Woman*, edited by Nancy Leigh DeMoss, 119.

him accomplish them. Pray for him; if you are not praying for him, who is? Grow spiritually in your relationship with the Lord. Your walk with Christ will significantly impact your marriage. There may be days when you only get fifteen minutes in the word when your children are little, but make it a priority to grow spiritually. Be an encourager; be his number one fan. Look for things to hearten him. We all respond better to encouragement. “A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word!” (Pro 15:23). Have times when you laugh together, enjoy one another, and have fun together; do not always be so serious. Speak respectfully. No man has become better from his wife’s continual criticism. “It is better to live in a corner of a roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman” (Pro 21:19), someone who is always nagging. Correct privately. It is not inappropriate for you to correct your husband. If you see inconsistencies or sin in his life, it is loving to point those out in a respectful way. But do it privately, not in front of the kids or others. These are some practical ways to be a helper. So ladies understand your purpose: your goal is to exalt Christ in your role as a wife. Second, know your design. God designed you to be a helper to your husband. Third, to be a Christ-exalting wife, you must:

C. Carry out your position. Little league: all the kids go after the ball. Play your position.

To honor Christ, you must play your position (**Eph 5:22, 24**). The way a wife carries out her role of being her husband’s helper is by respectfully submitting to his leadership. Though she is equal to her husband in her person and standing before God, she is to voluntarily put herself under his leadership. Ladies, submission is “a call to something strong and noble and beautiful and dignified and worthy of a woman’s highest spiritual and moral efforts,” because in doing this, you honor Christ.⁵ Paul gives:

1. The reason for submission (Eph 5:22-23). Since your husband is your head, you are to submit to him. Paul goes back to God’s original intent and design of the man and woman in the beginning. God created the man as the head—the leader. The woman was created as his suitable helper. So the wife is to submit to her husband because God created him as her head. Living this way

⁵ John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2009), 95.

in your marriage is for your benefit for it produces harmony and unity. You become one flesh. You each have your position to carry out.

But then Paul gives a greater reason for submission. God designed the man and the woman this way to picture a far greater reality: Christ and the church. The husband's headship is compared to Christ's headship of the church (**Eph 5:23**). As Christ is the head, authority, leader, and protector of his church, so husbands are the head, authority, leader, and protector of their wives. The wife's role is compared to the church (**Eph 5:24**). The church joyfully and freely submits to Christ. Ladies, you are to take your cues from how the church follows Christ and submit to your husband in a similar way. When you live like this, it brings honor to Jesus because it pictures the glad response of the church to Jesus' love. So the ultimate reason for submission is the glory of Christ. This is how you honor Jesus in your marriage: you submit to your husband. Do you do that? It might be helpful to talk with your husband today about this because there may be ways you are disrespecting him and dishonoring Jesus.

The purpose of Paul revealing these roles is not simply for you to have a joyful, harmonious marriage. This is for the glory of Christ. This is the reason for submission. So second you need to know:

2. The meaning of submission. Our culture does not like this word, because in their minds they picture subjugation, unequal treatment, inferiority, being subservient, or something degrading. Let's be honest, because of sin there are these things. But this is not the biblical definition of submission. The word *subject* means to line oneself up under, to yield to authority. It is something done voluntarily. Husbands are never told to make their wives submit; that would be subjugation. And husbands, you do not need to remind your wife that she needs to submit to you. She already knows that. Men, if you focused on loving your wives as Christ loved the church, this would make her submission much easier. Submission is something a person willingly does from the heart. It is a heart attitude. It is willingly putting yourself under another's authority even though they may be equal in standing with you. A wife submits ultimately because God commands her to.

The word *submission* always has the idea of one under authority submitting to the authority over them. For example, it is used of a child, Jesus, submitting to his parents (Lk 2:51). It is used of believers being subject to governing officials (Ro 13:1). It is used of servants being subject to their masters (Titus 2:9). A parallel would be an employee submitting to his boss, even if he is unreasonable. It is used of younger men being subject to their elders (1Pe 5:5). It is used of the church being subject to Christ (Ep 5:24); and of wives being subject to their own husbands (Ep 5:22; Co 3:18; Ti 2:5; 1Pe 3:1,5). So the word means to submit to someone who has authority over you. This is how it is used in every case.

From these examples we see that submission is not a woman thing. God has created this world with an authority/submission structure. We all understand this and benefit from it. If you are a Christian, you became one by submitting to Christ's authority. Now you live as a Christian under his authority, obeying his commands, which are not burdensome. One of his commands for wives is to submit to your own husbands. Your divine calling is to put yourself under his leadership. This is how you honor and affirm him and how you help him carry his leadership through according to your own gifts. When you do this, you exemplify the church's joyful submission to Christ. This is the meaning of submission.

Third, God commands wives to submit to their own husbands because he knows there will be:

3. A conflict with submission. This conflict arises from different reasons. One may be fear. Your husband may not be a good leader or even a Christian. So you feel vulnerable and fearful when submitting to him. Peter addresses women like this, exhorting them to submit to their husbands, putting their hope in God (1Pet 3:1, 5). A wife's hope is not in her husband, but in God's promises and power. So by faith look away from the things that make you fearful, and focus your attention on the sovereign power and love of God. Cling to his promises that he will be with you to will help you. Faith in God relieves your fears because you know God is bigger than your husband. A woman may also have a conflict with submission because of pride, for your natural sinful tendency is to usurp her husband's role (Gen 3). A wife usurps his role by manipulation, control, or nagging, instead of submitting to him.

When you manipulate your husband with tears or nag him to death until he is so worn out he gives in to what you want, that is not submission. You may have a conflict with submission because the voices of our culture keep telling you to leave your God-assigned post. God has called you to play your position, for this is the only way you and your husband can live as one flesh and honor Christ.

The conflict with submission is resolved when you are filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). When you let the Spirit fill you through your obedience to his word because it is richly dwelling in you, he will empower you to submit to your husband, even if he is disobedient to the word. When a woman submits like this it honors Christ because you are giving evidence of his power in you. This means that the woman who submits to her husband, far from being weak or passive, is actually a model of inner strength. By God's grace you have conquered the opposition that is in your flesh. The woman who will not submit is actually displaying weakness and immaturity, because she is only giving in to her natural inclination to usurp authority and have her own way. Doing that takes no effort at all!⁶ It takes strength to go against your flesh and fears, and submit to your husband. And God can give you that power through his Spirit, the word, prayer, and the encouragement of others. Fourth:

4. Your model for submission is Jesus (Eph 5:23). Jesus became the Savior because the Father planned for him to be the Savior, which Paul reveals in chapter one, where he praises the Father for his plan of redemption, which he accomplished through Jesus. Jesus willingly submitted to the Father's will, which meant being reviled, persecuted, and crucified. Submitting meant experiencing the wrath of God that he did not deserve. Jesus was not coerced or forced to do this. It was his delight to obey the Father and glorify him. His submitting to the Father did not make him less than the Father. He was still God, equal in essence to the Father. In a similar manner, wives are to willingly submit to the leadership of their husbands even when difficult. It does not make you less of a person for doing this. You are equal in nature to your husband.

⁶ Carolyn Mahaney, *Feminine Appeal*, 140.

The lie of feminism is that if you submit to your husband you will lose your identity and be seen as a doormat. It is portrayed as weakness. This is not what submission means. Think of Jesus submitting to the Father by going to Calvary. Did he struggle with submitting to him? Absolutely, he sweat drops of blood. Do you think Jesus was weak because he submitted and went through with it? Certainly not! He was resolved to voluntarily go to the cross. “Not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus had come to glorify the Father and that meant going to the cross. So, when the mob came to arrest him, Jesus willingly handed himself over to them. They did not take him by force. He could have called for legions of angels to help him. So submission, far from weakness, displays a strength of character, a resolve to do God’s will no matter what, even if you have a disobedient husband. It is one of the greatest displays of Christ’s power in you. When you think of Jesus going to the cross, what is displayed is his humility, selflessness, love, determination, resolve, and strength. No one says he was weak or a doormat because he submitted to the Father’s will. And he did not lose his identity when he submitted. Instead, it exhibited his glory. It put on display his character and the beauty of his person. Ladies this is exactly what is revealed when you submit; it puts on display your character and the beauty of your person.

Sometimes it takes strength of character to submit to a husband, especially when he is ungodly. When asked to submit to the cross, Jesus strengthened himself in persistent prayer. He reminded himself of his mission. This is how the godly woman responds. You may at times wrestle with submission, but you are to strengthen yourself in prayer and by faith hope in God. Remind yourself of your mission: to glorify Jesus. What will be displayed is not that you are weak or a doormat but your strength of character, the beauty of your person, and the glory of Christ in you. So your model for submission is Jesus.

5. Fifth, God puts: **A limit to submission (Eph 5:22)**. Ladies, you do not submit to someone else’s husband. There is a uniquely fitting submission to your own husband that is not appropriate in relation to other men. Sixth, God gives:

6. The motivation of submission: “as to the Lord” (Eph 5:22). Your motivation

to submit is Jesus. If Christ is your Lord, then you will submit to your husband, because it was the Lord who placed him over you. When you submit to your husband you are submitting to Jesus. It is because you love him and desire to honor him. But if you consistently do not submit to your husband, this may reveal Jesus is not your Lord. What a frightening thought. Is Jesus really your Lord?

Submission displays trust in Christ, because sometimes God places a husband over you that may not be a good leader. You have to trust that God is going to work through your husband. You have to trust Christ can work all things together for good, because sometimes your husband is going to make bad decisions. He is going to fail. But you have a God who is greater than your husband, who can take his failings and turn them into good. So a wife's motivation to submit is Christ. Seventh, God explains:

7. The extent of submission (Eph 5:24). Your submission encompasses all aspects of life because this relates to your role. God designed the husband and wife to become one flesh. To be one you cannot live as two autonomous individuals doing your own thing. You must live as one, with one head and one helper. A woman was created to be her husband's helper. Your joy and satisfaction comes from helping your husband. This is seen in submitting to your husband in everything.

A wife's example in submitting is seen in the church's relationship to Jesus. He is the head of the church, he himself being the Savior of the body (Eph 5:23). Christ exercised his headship by saving you from the wrath of God that should have rightly fallen on you. The church responds by gladly submitting to him. Just as the church is subject to Christ in everything, so a wife should submit to her husband in everything. God has created your role in marriage to picture this glorious truth of the gospel. And just as the church is benefitted when she submits to Christ, you also will find that it is not demeaning, but richly rewarding when you submit to your head.⁷

Now, let me be clear: this does not mean that you submit to your husband if he asks you to sin. Scripture says that you must obey God rather than men (Acts 4:18). So if your husband asks you to sin,

⁷ Knight, "Husbands and Wives", 170.

you must take a stand against him. Remember Ananias and Sapphira? She followed her husband into sin instead of taking a stand against him, and God struck them both dead (Acts 5:5, 10). But even when you must stand against your husband because of his sin, you can still have a spirit of submission. You can express through your attitude and actions that you do not like standing against him and that when he repents you will gladly submit to him. Let me say a few other things about submission.

Submission does not mean that a woman no longer thinks or acts, and only waits to be told what to do. The New Testament envisions women who hear the gospel of Christ, contemplate his glory and receive him, and then tell others about him. This is thinking and acting. Submission does not mean agreeing with everything your husband says. You should share your thoughts and actions with your husband in a respectful winsome way, but you also should be willing to submit to his leadership. In other words, you should be free to voice your opinions, concerns, perspective, counsel, not to get things your way, but hopefully to give a perspective that is helpful to your husband. Lovingly express your concerns and then be willing to submit to your husband's decision. There may be times when you want to appeal to your husband to reconsider a decision. A wise husband will listen to the counsel, concerns, and appeals of his wife. But if there is an impasse, he is responsible for making the final decision. Submission does not mean avoiding every effort to influence your husband. Peter envisions women who are saved who desire to win their husbands to Christ. Peter instructs you how to do this; you win them with your respectful behavior. Submission does not mean you are quiet when you see sin in your husband. If there is an area in his life that needs correction, you lovingly confront him with the word of God and then give him time to repent. Gently admonish him with the word and pray God would work on his heart. If there is unrepentant sin in his life, then you carry out Matthew 18. After you confront him, if he does not repent, you take two or three witnesses with you with the goal to see him turn back to Christ. Ladies, you carry out your position by being submissive. Last:

D. To live out the glorious role of a Christ-exalting wife: Have the right perspective (Eph

6:33b). When Paul summarizes the woman's role, he does not mention submission. Instead, the wife is to respect her husband. The man sees her submission as respect. You treat your husband this way for you recognize his God-given headship. You are to respect the role he occupies whether he deserves to be respected or not, because God has placed him over you. And when you do this it honors Christ. So let me finish with some practical things you can do to show respect to your husband.

1. Focus on your husband. Make him a priority. Put him first over the children. When God created marriage he made Adam and Eve without children. He did not have to do it that way; he could have created them with children. But God created marriage this way to show that the husband and wife relationship takes precedence over children. Wives, your husbands are your second highest calling behind Jesus. It is not being a mother. So prioritize your husband. You cannot set aside your relationship with your husband for the next fifteen years or so while you tend to the children. You need to cultivate your marriage. You are preparing your children to leave. One day they are going to be gone and you are going to be spending time with this man who you do not know. So cultivate your relationship by spending time together. Leave the kids and go out on a date. Prioritize your husband. Consider his work—job, goals, and ministry—as more important than your own (Phil 2!).

2. Show him respect by letting him lead. You may be tempted to constantly remind him what he needs to do. Solomon says, “A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious woman are alike” (Pro 27:15-16). A constant dripping is annoying. A man usually does not respond to nagging because from his perspective, it is his wife who is really doing the leading, not him. You can show disrespect by criticizing his decisions. It becomes obvious to the man that his wife can do everything better than he can, so why bother leading or doing anything? Let him lead.

3. Be grateful for your husband. It is easy to become discontented and grumble about his faults especially if you are comparing him to someone whom you think is the ideal man. (The only reason you think this is because you do not know him.) Guard what you think about him. Instead

of focusing on the negative, give God thanks for every excellent quality he has.

4. To be respectful practice godly communication. Tone matters! Body language matters. Ask questions instead of making accusations. Instead of, “you did it again!,” maybe say, “you may not be aware of this but when you did this it hurt my feelings.” It matters how you begin conversations. Avoid gossiping about your husband. Please pray for my husband. He is such a ____.

5. Have an orderly home. A woman’s primary responsibility is the home as wives are the home managers (1 Tim 5:14); the man is responsible to oversee the home (1 Tim 3:4). A wife can greatly assist her husband by administrating the home well. Ladies, make sure the duties of the home are being done. “She rises also while it is still night and gives food to her household. ... She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness” (Pro 31:15,27). If you squander away your time on the internet, hobbies, or shopping, you are not a help. Have an orderly home.

The man and woman were both created in God’s image and both were commanded to rule and subdue the earth. Ladies, you are to take dominion of your homes, subduing the chaos and creating order. Do not passively rely on your husband for help carrying out your role. He has his own role to do.

6. Last: Focus on being a godly woman. This is the greatest way to be a help to your husband. When you read Proverbs 31, one thing that is clear is that this woman was for her man and her home and he knew it. However gifted you are, you can choose to be for your man. And when a man knows this, he wants to love and lead you.

CONCLUSION: These are some practical things you can do to carry out the glorious role of a Christ-exalting wife. As you fulfill your role, this enables you and your husband to become one flesh as you work together as a team so that Christ is put on display through your marriage.