

## The Divine Pattern for Marriage, Part 3 *The Wife's Priorities*

### Introduction

The Christian standard of living is different from that of the world. As believers we are to be salt and light in a decaying and dark society. God calls us to be different. Unfortunately, that isn't easy when we become victims of society. Sometimes, we become so deeply engulfed in the world's system that even though God's Word speaks clearly on certain issues, we have a difficult time hearing, understanding, and applying its teaching.

Over and over, the New Testament calls us to another level of living, another style of life, another dimension of existence. It calls us to a new thinking, new talking, new acting, and new ministries. For example, we are to "*set [our affections] on things above, not on things on the earth*" (Col. 3:2); we are to "*put on the new man*" (Eph. 4:24; cf. Col. 3:10); we are able to "*walk worthy of the vocation which [we] are called*" (Eph. 4:1); and we no longer walk as the Gentiles walk or function as the world functions (Eph. 4:17). In other words, we have been translated from the "*power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of [God's] dear Son*" (Col. 1:13).

We don't think as the world thinks; we don't act as the world acts; we don't talk as the world talks; we don't set goals that the world sets; and we don't do the things that the world does. We are called to be distinct. Our distinction is our identification with God. The hope of humanity is that in seeing the distinction they would be drawn to Jesus Christ. The whole objective for the believer is to be unique, different, set apart. And the key is in Ephesians 5:18: "*Be filled with the Spirit.*" The only thing that will separate us from the world is to be filled with the Spirit of God. If we're filled with the things of the world, there will be no difference.

I realize that sometimes it is difficult to live by the Spirit. We are often too preoccupied with a system that has infiltrated our thinking and tried to push us into its mold. But as believers, we belong to Jesus Christ and are to think differently from the way the world thinks. That goal becomes specific when we start talking about marriage and the home.

### Review

#### I. The Duty of the Wife (vv. 22-24)

##### A. The Matter of Submission (v. 22a)

1. Colossians 3:18
2. 1 Peter 3:1-6
3. 1 Corinthians 11:3-12
4. Titus 2:3-5
5. Proverbs 31:10-31

- ***The Jewish View of Wives' Duties***

The Mishna is the codification of Jewish Law. It gives standards of Jewish behavior and reveals the attitudes the Jews had at the time of Christ, some of which were inherited from their Old Testament roots. The Mishna has several things to say regarding the home and the duties of the wives.

1. Household duties

The wife was to grind flour, bake, launder, cook, nurse her children, make the beds, spin wool, prepare the children for school, and take the children to school to ensure their arrival.

2. Employment

a. Alongside her husband

From the Mishna, we know that some women did work together with their husbands in the fields picking fruit---but it was always alongside of and in support of their husbands.

According to the Mishna, there were some women who worked apart from their husbands in the marketplace. They were considered to be a disgrace to society.

b. In the home

A wife could work at crafts or horticulture in the home and sell the fruits of her labor. That was sometimes done to supplement the husband's income or to be used as pocket money for personal use.

3. Adornment

Although a housewife was kept busy with her work in the house, she was still expected to adorn herself properly. That point was stressed in many traditions.

4. Philanthropy

Apart from strictly household work, the wife was also responsible for hospitality and the care of guests. Wives were active in charitable work, giving alms to poor people who came to their houses and participating in charitable projects outside the home.

The Jewish laws were clear: the women's priority was in the home. She was to take care of all the needs of her home, her children, her husband, stranger, the poor and needy, and guests. Then she could work alongside her husband to assist him in his work. And if she had any time left over, she could be as enterprising as she wanted (e.g. Prov. 31:10-31).

• ***Understanding the Priorities***

It's sad to think what the next generation of mothers is going to be like if they don't understand their priorities. The responsibility to rear children is in the home.

Proverbs 1:8-9 says that a child is not only to listen to his father's instruction but also to the law of his mother. A wife is to take care of her husband's needs, to be supportive of his life and career, and to work alongside him, ministering to him. She is also to build up her own spiritual life so that she can be a godly mother to her children, always available in a crisis and there to teach them. Often those times of teaching and interaction take preparation, but that's a priority. Don't believe that God expects a mother to work full time so that she can send her children to a Christian school; the Christian school will never be able to overcome the lack of commitment on the part of the mother. If she is not preoccupied with spiritual instruction and committed to teaching her children the things of God, the school will never be able to override the impact of that testimony in the home.

When a wife has fulfilled all those priorities in the home, then she has a responsibility to help the needy and the poor and to be involved in ministering to people. Christian mothers in the home during the day could be a valuable resource to their neighborhood and community. When the priorities are met and a mother has time left over, she may want to pursue something that's enterprising and creative, and that's fine. But she needs to fulfill the priorities first.

## Lesson

### 6. 1 Timothy 5:3-16

I want to illustrate the woman's role in the home and her priorities by looking at this passage on the care of widows.

- a. Verse 3 --- *"Honor widows that are widows indeed."* Widows without resources ("widows indeed") are to be cared for and supported ("honor" means pay, cf. v. 17) and not forced to go to work, again reinforcing that a woman is to have her ministry in the home. I believe the principle of supporting a widow without resources could even be applied, for example, to a believing wife whose unbelieving husband commits adultery and forsakes her---leaving her with children at home. She should not be forced to go to work. A woman who has no resources is to be paid. Verse 4 tells us who should take care of her.
- b. Verse 4 --- *"If any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to show piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God."* If a man is related to a widow without resources, he is to practice his Christianity in the home by supplying her need before practicing it in the church. Again, that is so she can stay in the home---where God wants her to be.
- c. Verse 5 --- *"Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day."* What is a woman to do when she becomes a desolate widow? Is she to immediately check out the classified ads? No. She is to fall on her knees and beseech God for some source of supply. She is to cast herself upon God's mercy. That is why the Bible tells us to meet the needs of widows. James 1:27 says, *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in*

*their affliction*” That is the responsibility of the people of God---and it always has been.

So the widow is to pray and seek God; however, the alternative is in verse 6.

- d. Verse 6 --- *“But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.”* The phrase “liveth in pleasure” is from the Greek word *σπαταλε*, which gives the idea of living in wanton luxury---pleasure madness. If she chooses to live that way, she is as dead as her husband. Why? Because she is deadening herself to God’s standards. There are just two alternatives her. Either she is on her knees praying for God’s supply or she’s out living in the world. Notice this passage doesn’t give working as an alternative; she is to be cared for,
- e. Verse 7 --- *“And these things command, that they may be blameless.”* These principles are not optional or just something to think about; they are commands. To disobey is to be blamed.
- f. Verse 8 --- *“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel [unbeliever].”* That is serious. We talk about a lot of sins in the Bible, but you don’t hear too many sermons on this verse. Men need to support the widows in need who are related to them. Rather than force widows to work for their own support, men are to care for them---that’s God’s standard. And if they don’t, they are to be blamed because they are in reality denying the faith. Why? Because the Christian faith embodies providing for widows. Also, not supporting them would be worse than what unbelievers do, because many of them care for their widows,

You may ask, “What if there are no men around who can support a widow?” According to verse 6, if there is no man who can be the resource, then a believing woman may step in: *“If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them.”* (Note that the phrase “man or” in verse 16 is not in the most accurate manuscripts). The believing women who have resources may minister to widows by providing them with lodging, meals, or clothing.

You may ask, “who provides for the widow who doesn’t have any relatives to take care for her?” The end of verse 16 says, *“and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.”* If there is no man or no woman to do it, the church should. And that doesn’t necessarily mean the church will budget in such an expense. It means that the people who make up the community of faith can reach out to that widow in need.

The point of the passage is this: a woman is to be cared for and not left to her own resources---especially when there is no father or man in the house. She is to fall on the mercy of God, who then extends this divine directive first to the men, then to the women, and then to the church: “Gather that widow in your arms!” And that is precisely what the early church did (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-6).

- g. Verse 9 --- *“Let not a widow be taken into the number under sixty years old.”* The phrase “taken into the number” refers to the widow list of the early church. Two rules applied to the list: (1) the church would take on the full support of widows who reached the age of sixty; and (2) those who joined the list became part of the group of widows who represented the church in an official ministry.

There were prerequisites to being put on the list other than being sixty years old or more. The first one is at the end of verse 9: *“having been the wife of one man.”* In other words, a one-man woman, one who was absolutely devoted and loving to her husband. That does not necessarily rule out a divorce or having been married more than once; it refers to the intensity of her commitment to the man who was her husband. She was to be a woman who loved her husband.

- h. Verse 10 --- A further prerequisite was that she be *“Well reported of for good works.”* She had to have a reputation for doing good. What were some of those good works? *“If she have brought up children.”* Notice that she didn’t just bear them, she brought them up. Not only that but *“if she have lodged strangers.”* She had to be available for hospitality, having a home where there was always food, a warm place of receptivity, and a bed for someone who needed it. She also had to have *“have washed the saints’ feet... relieved the afflicted... [and] diligently followed every good work.”*

- i. Verse 11-16 --- summing up these verses, Paul basically says, “Don’t put the younger widows on the list.” Why? Because it would be difficult for the young widows to keep their commitment as “official widows.” They would begin their ministry in total devotion and service to Christ, but after a period of time many would notice men and desire to get married again. Once that happened, their ministry would no longer appeal to them, and they would put aside their commitment. Without a total commitment to Christ, the continued financial support of the church, instead of enabling them to maintain a godly life-style, would cause them to *“learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not”* (v. 13).

Therefore, the younger widows ought to *“marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some are already turned aside after Satan”* (vv. 14-15). A younger widow was not to be put in the church’s list; she was to be remarried and get back in the home with a husband who would then take over her care. She was to bear children and be a keeper at home. And again, we’re right back to that divine priority.

- ***The Choice is Yours***

You have to choose the level at which you want to live. The Bible doesn’t say women can’t work. But you have to determine whether you’re going to take the higher standard or something less. Psalm 113 implies that motherhood is God’s highest calling for a woman. Not all women are called to be married or have children, but still the choice is yours.

Hannah lived at the highest level of divine priority (1 Sam. 1:21-23). Her husband, Elkanah, asked her to go on a trip with him to the Temple before her little baby, Samuel, had been fully weaned (lit., “fully dealt with”). But Hannah wouldn’t go. She wouldn’t leave her child. And according to what we know from the apocryphal writings, the age of being “fully dealt with” was at least three years of age. Until she had fully dealt with that child in terms of physical feeding and the spiritual input he needed until he was three, she wouldn’t take him on a trip because that would disrupt her time with him.

- ***Is Your Moral Character Being Undermined?***

Mothers, there is no sense in staying home if you are watching soap operas and polluting your mind. Few things will corrupt the mind as subtly as will watching television programs all day long. You cannot sit and watch garbage without it undermining your moral character. There’s no virtue in being at home unless a spiritual purpose is being accomplished.

#### 7. Genesis 3:16

Why is there so much rebellion against God-ordained priorities in marriage and the family? Genesis 1:27-28 says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion.” Notice that even though God made woman to be a suitable helper (Gen. 2:18), and even though He made the man to be the head (1 Cor. 11:3-12; 1 Tim. 2:11-15), God said to them, “*Be fruitful, and multiply... fill the earth... subdue it: and have dominion.*” They were co-regents. They ruled together. The principles of leadership and submission aren’t even visible because prior to sin the relationship was so beautiful, so God-ordained, and so pure that they multiplied together, filled the earth together, subdued the earth together, and ruled together. But in Genesis 3, sin enters into the picture, and immediately they are cursed.

a. “*Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception.*” In other words, the pain of child birth was to be a constant reminder to every women who would ever live that she is a victim of sin. That is part of the curse but there’s more.

b. “*And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee*”

##### 1) What it does not mean

Most commentators say that this means that it’s normal for a wife to have a strong sexual and psychological dependence on her husband, and that it’s normal for her to desire the man and for the man to rule over her. But that can’t be the interpretation.

- a) Sexually, in most cases, the man has a much stronger desire for physical fulfillment with a woman than a woman does for a man.
- b) Historically, women have never loved their role of submission to their husbands. There isn't a period in history where women weren't chafing underneath male authority.
- c) If this was just the normal desire, it wouldn't be a curse; before the Fall, the woman was wonderfully submissive and dependent on the man. So, whatever of this passage is, it must be something different from what it was before the curse.

2) What it does mean

- a) *“And he shall rule over thee.”*

The word translated “rule” is **masal** in Hebrew. It means “to reign” or “to rule.” IN the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) the word is **καθιστεμι**, which means “to install in an office: or “to elevate to an official position.” So, as part of the curse, God in effect said to the woman, “You were once co-regents, wonderfully ruling together as a team, but from now on the man is installed over you.” That was a new kind of ruling---an authority that had never been known before.

Regarding the word **masal**, C. F. Keil states: “Created for the man, the woman was made subordinate to him from the very first; but the supremacy of the man was not intended to become a despotic rule” (**Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament**, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], p. 103). But in the Fall, that's what it became. Eve usurped the leadership of Adam when she took the fruit. The curse on the woman is that man is going to rule over her. But that's only half of the picture.

- b) *“And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”*

The word **desire** is the Hebrew word **tsukha**. This word is used only one other time in the Pentateuch, fifteen verse later in 4:7. **Tsukha** comes from an Arabic root that means “to compel, to impel, to urge, to seek control.” Notice it does not come from the Arabic root for “exciting,” “loving,” or “psychological desire.” To get a feeling for what Genesis 3:16 is saying, look how **tsukha** is translated in 4:7. The best textual rendering of this verse is: “Sin will desire to master you [or control you], but you must master it.” In other words, God said to Cain, “Now Cain, sin will desire to control you, but you must master it. The word **desire** in Genesis 4:7 (**tsukha**) is the same word, in the same grammatical structure, in an absolutely identical form of as the word in 3:16. So, whatever the word means in 4:7, it will also mean back in 3:16 because it's in the same context. Therefore 3:16 would read: “Your desire will be to control your husband, but he will rule over you.”

The woman usurped the place of the man, and she was cursed: “He shall rule over thee.” In other words, the man would subdue her tendency to control him. And

because Adam followed the lead of Eve (3:17), God added to the curse and said, in effect, “From now on she’s going to keep seeking to control you.”

- ***Is There an Answer to the Curse?***

As part of the curse of God on the sin of Adam and Eve, God essentially said, “Family life is going to be impossible without Me. In the same way that you are going to have to fight the weeds in the ground to grow food, you are going to have to fight in your marriage. In marriage, the woman’s desire will be to control the man and he will have to subdue her.” That’s why we have women pushing for equal rights and male chauvinists crushing them down. So what’s the answer? The curse is erased in Jesus Christ. When people know and love the Lord Jesus Christ and are filled with the Spirit, wives will submit to their husbands; and husbands, instead of being dictators, will love their wives as Christ loved the church. When that takes place, we’re right back to the way it was before the Fall.

Women have been oppressed by the crushing power of men who want to keep them subdued; men have been hassled by women who want to rise to the top and take over---but Christians have the answer: Jesus Christ. When Christ comes into people’s lives and the Spirit of God fills them, men and women submit to the God-ordained pattern, and the home becomes as it was in the Garden before the Fall. Together they’re fruitful, together they multiply, together they have dominion, together they subdue, and together they work out the plan of God in their lives. Christianity is not offering to the world the suppression of women and the exaltation of men (or vice versa). Christianity offers, through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, the perfection of men and women in their God-ordained and God-created roles. And when that happens, and the home becomes the place where spiritual life functions, God will raise up a godly seed and perpetuate it into the next generation.

**B. The Manner of Submission** (v. 22b)

**C. The Motive of Submission** (v. 23a)

**D. The Model of Submission** (v. 23b-24)

### **Focusing on the Facts**

1. How are Christians expected to live in a morally decaying World spiritually dark society? Why is it hard to live like that?
2. Why are Christians not to do the things the world does? What is the key to being able to separate oneself from the world?
3. Where was the woman’s priority according to Jewish law contained in the Mishna?
4. What priorities does a Christian mother have with regard to her family? What should her secondary priorities be?
5. How are widows without resources to be honored according to 1 Timothy 5:3-4, 8? Through whom has God designed for her needs to be met?

6. What did the early church do for widows who had no other resources and who had reached the age of sixty?
7. Identify some of the prerequisites that had to be met to put a widows in the church's list. Where do they imply that she spent most of her time?
8. What were younger widows obligated to do?
9. What element of the curse would be a reminder to women that they are victims of sin (Gen. 3:16)?
10. What type of desire would the wife have for her husband when evaluated in light of Genesis 4:7, where the same Hebrew word is used? How was that a curse upon Adam?
11. How can the conflict of women's liberation and male chauvinism resolved? Explain.
12. What will happen to the home when men and women are perfected in their God-ordained roles? What will God raise up as a result of that?

### **Pondering the Principles**

1. Is your home a place that highlights your uniqueness in Christ? Do the relationships among your family members reflect lives that are focused on godly values and directed by the Spirit? When people walk into your home, do they sense an orderliness and a peacefulness that should characterize every Christian home? Meditate as a family on Colossians 3:12-21, using those verses as a guideline for a devotional time together. Determine what qualities mentioned in the passage are lacking or weak in your family. Confess to one another the wrong attitudes and actions each has been exhibiting. After you choose an area you need to concentrate on, pray for one another that each may be strengthened to live the quality of life that glorifies Christ.
2. Does your church have a ministry to widows? Is it taking the responsibility to care for godly widows who have no other means of support? If not, would you be instrumental in praying with your pastor about such a ministry and helping to initiate it? As a preventative measure against the church's being overburdened (1 Tim. 5:16), consider having a financial planner or tax adviser give a seminar to your church members on how they can prepare for premature death of a breadwinner and their retirement years. They might also suggest some effective ways that dependent widows can be assisted through trusts providing the donor with tax advantages.
3. If you are a mother who is staying at home with your children, are you taking advantage of your opportunity to shape their lives for godly living? Or is your time spent unproductively with television programs that might be tearing down the very principles you are trying to instill into your life and your children's? Make sure every day has spiritual input so that your children begin looking at life from God's perspective. Prepare them for society's secular influence by teaching godly values (Prov. 22:6; 2 Tim. 3:15).