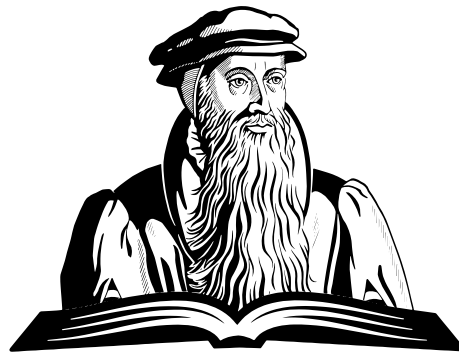

VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL MARRIAGE

LECTURE 5: GODLY WIVES 1

Lecture Presenter: Robert D. McCurley M.Div.



The John Knox Institute
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Unless otherwise indicated all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

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Module

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE

8 LECTURES

ROBERT D. MCCURLEY M.DIV.

1. Priorities in a Christian Marriage
2. The Unity in Marriage
3. Headship
4. Servant and Shepherd
- 5. Godly Wives 1**
6. Godly Wives 2
7. Communication
8. Finances and Physical Relationship

Lecture 5

GODLY WIVES 1

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 5

Have you ever found yourself in the middle of a project where you needed more than two hands to complete a task? Perhaps you needed to lift and carry an awkwardly shaped object. In those circumstances, you are certainly grateful when another person comes along and offers to help you. Another set of hands goes a long way toward enabling you to complete your task. You can understand why Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, “Two are better than one.” In Genesis 1 and 2, we read about God creating the first man, Adam. After Adam had named the other creatures, we read, “But for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.” So God provided for him the first woman, Eve, who became his wife. We read, “And the LORD God said, It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” This provided a pattern for all who would follow. God said, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

What peculiar challenges do women face when hearing what the Bible teaches about godly wives? What role has God given to wives in marriage? Why does God call wives to submit to their husbands? And what are the practical implications of that? And how does all of this relate to Christ and the gospel? In this lecture and the next lecture, we will explore what the Bible teaches about the place of wives within a biblical marriage. As with the other lectures, I will mention many texts of Scripture, and although time will not permit us to quote them all, I would strongly urge you to look them all up. Our thinking needs to be bound to the Bible itself.

And so first of all, in this lecture, we’ll begin by considering a wife’s high calling. I want to introduce some basic points of counsel aimed at setting the perspective of wives before we proceed to considering the main content of this lecture. Wives have indeed a high calling in God’s sight. This privileged role, however, is constantly being undermined by a barrage of secular, ungodly assaults that seek to distort the biblical teaching on the role of women. Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer from the 16th century, wrote, “What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord God.” We should accustom ourselves to think of our position and work as sacred and well-pleasing to God, not on account of the position and work, but on account of the Word and faith from which the obedience and work flow.

Being a wife and a mother is a difficult job, but thankfully God gives direction to even those with an overwhelmed heart. In Psalm 61:2 the Psalmist speaks about when our hearts are overwhelmed within us, we look to the Rock that is higher than us. That’s, of course, looking to the Lord Jesus Christ. So different women will respond to the truths that we will be covering in a variety of ways. For example, some genuinely want to grow but will merely look for a list of duties to follow. They want checklist of things that they are to follow. Others genuinely want to grow but will be easily overwhelmed and discouraged. Some, on the other hand, will be tempted to shut their ears in resentment and resistance to the biblical teaching. And, some will be tempted to indifference caused by hopelessness, perhaps. Well, the best response is to be drawn to our heavenly Husband, which will bear the fruit of a teachable spirit and a willing obedience. This includes, of course, differentiating between man’s expectations on the one hand and God’s expectations on the other, as well as accepting our providential limitations.

So, please do not yield to the folly of comparison, comparing yourself as a wife with perhaps other wives that you know or see. In 2 Corinthians 10:12, the Apostle Paul warns the Corinthian church, and he says that those who compare themselves among themselves are not wise. It is tempting, of course, to look around at other people and to see what you think maybe the perfect marriage or family might look like; but, as Paul says, this is not wise. A biblical marriage and family is going to look very, very different from house to house because we're different people, different members of Christ's body with different gifts and talents and even different interests and physical abilities. The point is that we must conform to the specifics of God's law and God's Word, but there is much freedom for variety in how this is implemented. In other words, there are no universal model families that we can take our cue from. Most of all, wives need to remember not to take your eyes off Christ. Comparison can result in the extremes of pride, on one hand, if you think that you're better, or it can result in debilitating discouragement, if you think that you're far inferior to others. But in every case, God says that it is foolish. Our eyes are to be fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me also offer a word to husbands. 1 Corinthians 13:4 and following tells us that love "suffers long." You can also look up Ecclesiastes 7:8-9. And so husbands would do well to remember the patient longsuffering that Christ exemplifies toward His bride. Now husband, of course, is a part of that bride, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you think in your own life of all of the endurance and patience that the Lord has demonstrated toward you. It would be helpful to look at how this is described in Scripture; for example, in Numbers 14:18, or in a variety of places within the Psalms, for example, Psalm 86:15 and Psalm 103:8-10.

Secondly, we should consider the wife's role, which is described in Scripture as a helpmeet. The woman was designed and created to be a helpmeet to her husband as Genesis 2:18 teaches us. The Bible provides us with a beautiful picture in this. Eve was not taken from Adam's head so as to rule over him, nor was she taken from his feet as if he would trample on her, but she was taken from his side to be a suitable companion to complement and complete him. A wife is a helpmeet for her husband, who comes alongside him to support and strengthen and comfort him in the calling that God has given him.

It's helpful to remember that the Bible points us to distinctions between men and women. Let me give you some examples. We're told that the woman was made out of man (1 Corinthians 11:8). She was also made after men (1 Corinthians 11:9). We're told in 1 Timothy 2:13 that she was made for man, and we're also told that she was the first one that was deceived in 1 Timothy 2:14. In terms of marriage, she is a bodily member, and her husband, as we saw in a previous lecture, is her head (Ephesians 5:23). And this, of course, reflects, you'll remember, the relationship between Christ and the Church. A couple of distinctions here may prove helpful to you regarding a person's status.

So, regarding a person's status, women stand on equal ground with men before the Lord in the gospel. Galatians 3:28 says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." As a Christian person, there is no distinction between the ability of a man and a woman when it comes to grace and gifts. Women can be equally godly, talented, and intelligent, and so on. But the biblical distinction pertains to the role assigned by God for expressing those gifts and graces. Regarding a person's role, for example, within the church, women are to be in subjection, not teaching or exercising authority over men. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 say, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." And within the home, wives are to submit to their own husbands. These things pertain to role, and this means to gladly assume the role that God assigns is to embrace God's design and His wisdom, which always works best, of course.

The injunction to submit, far from being harsh, is actually beautiful in its godly expressions. This subjection in marriage, the wife's subjection to the husband, is unique, because the Bible says that a wife is to submit "to her own husband," not to all other men. Ephesians 5:22 and Colossians 3:18 teach this. The husband is the head who lovingly leads, and the wife is the helpmeet who submissively follows. This will, for a wife, entail deferring to his judgment, supporting his decisions, and promoting his priorities in the home; consider Titus 2:5 and 1 Peter 3:1-6.

Thirdly, we need to consider a wife's pursuit, and that's described by the word submission. [There're] actually a number of words that are used in the Scriptures to describe this submission. The biblical injunction says that wives are to "submit" to their own husbands (Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18). It also says that they are to

be “in subjection” to their own husband (Ephesians 5:24 and in 1 Peter 3:1,5). Elsewhere, it says that they are to “revere their husbands” (Ephesians 5:33), and they are to “obey” their husbands (Titus 2:5 and 1 Peter 3:6). So all of these words, submission, and subjection, and reverence, and obedience, they’re all describing this biblical concept of submission. The wife is to submit to her husband.

Now this submission is a reflection of the Church’s relationship to her Bridegroom; the Church is Christ’s bride, and it’s actually reflecting the Church’s relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the whole point, as we’ve seen in a previous lecture, of Ephesians 5:22 and following. And so, in Colossians 3:8 Paul says specifically [that] the wife is to submit to her husband as to the Lord Jesus Christ. Submission is not conditional on the husband doing his part to love as Christ loved the Church. Now, this can be tempting to think along these lines. You cannot say that if your husband loved you more, then you would be a more submissive wife, any more than a husband can say, “Well, I would love my wife more if she were more submissive.” In fact, this is the precise idea that God refutes in 1 Peter 3:1 and following.

This submission, the wife’s submission, is to be expressed even in undesirable circumstances. So we’re told that even if the husband is an unbeliever, 1 Corinthians 7:13-17, or if the husband is acting disobediently, 1 Peter 3, those opening two verses tell us, “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.” And there Peter gives us the example of Sara. Sara proved that unlovable husbands are no excuse for a lack of submission. We are responsible before God for our own behavior. Blame-shifting, blaming others for the faults that we’re guilty of, began immediately after the fall, you’ll remember, and it continues to be a temptation to the present day. We see this in Genesis 3:12-13. The reason this submission is not based on the husband’s action or inaction is because your submission is directed ultimately to Christ, who is always loving and always faithful to you.

You should also recognize that this biblical call to submission is not something that began after the fall. There are some who have put this idea out, that a wife’s submission is a consequence of the fall. No, it is rooted all the way back in creation, and the New Testament makes this clear. And in 1 Timothy 2:13-14 as well as 1 Corinthians 11:3 and 8, the Apostle Paul appeals to creation as the basis of his argument. He also appeals in 1 Corinthians 14:34 to the law.

Well, this submission is inescapable, just as we saw with the husband’s headship. Wives are always saying something through your life, either truthfully or erroneously, about the gospel and the relationship of the church to the Lord Jesus Christ, again, Ephesians 5:24. Well, a woman who embraces all that God calls her to in godly submission is a woman that is truly priceless, and that’s the language that’s used in Proverbs 31; look at verses 10-12 and verses 28-29.

As we noted earlier, a wife is to obey her husband. We see that in Titus 2:5 and 1 Peter 3:6. This is rooted in the fifth commandment, which you can find in Exodus 20:12. And you have to realize that each of the ten commandments provides a moral principle. So in the fifth commandment, God sets down a standard for honoring and respecting all lawful authority, the parent-child relationship being the most basic one. I would encourage you to consult the Westminster Larger Catechism Questions 123-133 for a helpful explanation of this biblical truth. We’re told that the wife is to obey her husband in all things; that’s the language of Ephesians 5:24. The idea of submission and obedience are related to each other.

You’ll recall that God’s design for biblical marriage is oneness. And yet, they are still two people: a husband and a wife. Well, in order for two to function as one, God directs the wife to come under the leadership of the husband. And where there are differences, then she must acquiesce to his desire to lead in following the Lord Jesus Christ. But, we also need to remember that all human authority is derived authority with God-ordained parameters. Only God has ultimate unqualified authority. All of the authority that He gives in this world is delegated from Him. Consequently, for example, a wife is not to submit to her husband if she is asked to sin. Why? Because her first allegiance is to the Lord Jesus Christ, and it would be an abuse of the husband’s position to ask her to do what is dishonoring to the Lord. You’ll remember those words in Acts 4:19 where the apostles respond by insisting that it is better to obey God than men when you are forced to make a choice between the two.

From the time of the fall, it has been a constant temptation for a woman to rebel against her husband. The entrance of sin at the fall made it now, in a sense, unnatural to desire submission, just as it is unnatural for the

husband to desire to love his wife to the degree that he should. And so it is grace in the gospel alone that makes this both desirable and possible. We have to be looking away to these fundamental gospel truths.

Well, on the flip side of a godly wife, you have a contentious wife, and a contentious wife is described in rather vivid color as a “curse” in the book of Proverbs. Look, for example, at 21:19 or 27:15. Well, if a contentious wife is a curse, a godly wife is described in that same book, the book of Proverbs, as a crown (Proverbs 12:4, 19:14, and then, of course, those references within chapter 31 to the virtuous woman).

Obedience to the husband, like to Christ, like obedience to Christ, is to be carried out willingly, cheerfully, fully, and from the heart. The motivation for obedience is not just a duty that we’re required to do, but it is actually something that flows from love for the Lord and love for one’s husband. A wise woman builds up her house rather than tearing it down. She can tear it down through nagging and criticizing and perhaps belittling your husband or dashing dreams, neglecting him, and so on. Proverbs 14:1 says, “Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.”

Well, this means that we need to keep first things first. In other words, relating to your earthly husband is just one more way of walking with your heavenly Husband, and so the relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ provides the pattern and foundation and source of help in living with your earthly husband. You might ask, rightly, the question, “Who is sufficient for these things?” I mean, after all, we often sense that we’re full of bankruptcy and neediness and dependence upon the Lord. Well, we must be led to live upon Christ’s love and led to live upon Christ’s grace. We’re to hold fast to Him and to live for His glory. And this is the heart behind every God-fearing wife.

In this lecture, we have explored what the Bible teaches about a godly wife’s role and pursuits. In the next lecture, we will go on to consider the inner character of a wife who fears the Lord.