

1 Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:3-5
What's a Woman to Do?
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In Ephesians 5:2, we read that Christ loved us and gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma. This verse uses a sweet smelling aroma as a metaphor for the pleasing nature of Christ's atoning work in the estimation of God the Father. God the Father took pleasure in the sacrificial work of Christ because He saw Christ's death upon the cross as an act of love and reconciliation. This pleasure God has in the cross is analogous to the pleasure we experience when we smell the fragrance of a scented candle or the aroma of a delicious meal.

I believe we can also use this metaphor of an aroma to describe the general spirit or atmosphere of a home. Every home has an atmosphere, a prevailing spirit. The opinions, the passions, the prejudices of a family permeate a house just as surely as the air which all the occupants breath. Doug Wilson in his book **Reforming Marriage** uses this metaphor and asks the following attention getting and thought provoking question:

"How would you describe the spiritual aroma of your home? When visitors arrive, before virtually anything is said or done, what is one of the first things they notice about your family? In many cases, it is the aroma. Do they

feel as though a bad attitude crawled under your refrigerator and died? Or do they think someone has been baking spiritual bread in the kitchen all afternoon?"

That is a very challenging question which we too often fail to consider. Our problem is that an offensive odor is something a person can get used to and become unaware of. After continuous exposure to a pervasive smell for a length of time, our noses become desensitized. When I was young, my father worked in an old mercantile store. For a time, one of our relatives was raising pigs, and my father told me that everyone noticed the smell when our relative came into the store. Everyone, that is, except him. He didn't smell a thing. When it comes to determining the distinctive aroma of our homes, sometimes we need the help of others whose noses have not been desensitized.

The spiritual aroma of a marriage arises not so much from outward actions. Anyone can go through the motions, especially for the benefit of an audience. The spiritual aroma of a marriage arises from the innermost attitudes of the heart. For a marriage to have a sweet smelling savor, the husband must love his wife sacrificially, and the wife must respect her husband submissively.

These are the Biblically defined roles for the husband and wife found in Ephesians chapter five. The husband must love his wife enough to die for her. The wife must respect her husband enough to live for him.

Psychologically, a man is task oriented. He can so focus on his tasks in life that he forgets the importance of his personal relationship with his wife. What a woman fears most is abandonment, and she so appreciates knowing that her husband loves her unconditionally. It is the husband's responsibility to maintain the security in the relationship by loving his wife sacrificially.

Psychologically, a woman is more people oriented and relationship oriented. She can so focus on the emotional and relational aspects of marriage that she forgets the importance of the job her husband is doing as head of the household. What a man fears most is failure, and he so appreciates knowing that his wife respects him for the job he is trying to do. It is the wife's responsibility to bring order to the relationship by respectfully submitting to her husband's leadership. When a wife does that, then truly a man's home is his castle.

In a previous sermon, we focussed more on the husband's responsibilities. Today, in the spirit of "what's good for the gander is good for the goose," we are going to focus more on the wife's responsibilities.

Let's begin with what is most basic, and that is submission and obedience. We find this responsibility in Titus 2:5, which says that she is to be "obedient to her own husband." The word here translated "obedient" is a passive participle of the verb translated "submit" in Ephesians 5, where we read in verse 22:

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord."

The wife is to submit to her husband out of respect for the position God has given him. God is not a God of chaos, and He has ordained an orderly arrangement for society. In this arrangement, everyone at some time has to submit to someone else. Children should submit to their parents. Church members should submit to the joint authority of their elders. Employees should submit to their employers. We need to respect and submit to this entire Biblically revealed system of social order, preserving the honor and performing the duties belonging to every God-ordained position of authority. When we do this, we are submitting not only to the authority immediately over us but also to God, who bestowed the authority and established this social hierarchy.

When I once had a desk job as a computer programmer back when I was in college, I remember displaying on my desk Colossians 3:23, which in context is talking about a servant's service to his master. Here is the larger passage:

"Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ."

When we submit to the person God has in some way put in authority over us, we are in a more ultimate sense submitting to God. We are to submit to the person God has put over us, not in all of life but in his legitimate sphere of authority, as long as we

can do so without sinning against God. Our first obligation is to obey God. When we have to make a choice, we are to obey God and not men. We are to submit to those God has put over us as long as doing that does not conflict with our duty to submit to God Himself.

I recognized this principle when I was an employee under an employer. The same principle applies to a wife under the authority of her husband. When she obeys him, she is also obeying God.

Wives, remember, the rule of thumb is to submit to your husband as long as you can do so without sinning against God. The rule of thumb is not to submit to your husband as long as you think he is right. There are those times when your obligation before God is to submit to your husband even when you know he is mistaken. I'm not saying that is an easy thing to do. I'm not saying you shouldn't respectfully inform your husband that you disagree with him and why. But if he still insists on his original decision, you need to let him have his way.

Now why should you do that? Allow me to give you two practical reasons. Let's say your husband makes a wrong decision that ends up costing you a thousand dollars. What you need to remember is that the order and stability of your marriage is worth more than a thousand dollars.

Secondly, your husband is not going to learn how to lead unless you allow him to make some mistakes and to learn from them

without your saying "I told you so." View the thousand dollar loss as tuition in the school of family leadership. And pray that God will enable you to take advantage of the situation as an opportunity to bear the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Let me also suggest a way to evaluate how well you are doing as a submissive wife. Ephesians 5:24 says:

"Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything."

Think a moment about the church in America. Then imagine that the church started submitting to Christ to the same degree and with the same spirit that you submit to your husband. Ask yourself this question: would that be good, or would that be bad?

Husbands, here's a reminder for you from our previous sermon on the husband's responsibilities. Remember that it will be much easier for your wife to submit to your authority if you fulfill your responsibility in marriage to love your wife sacrificially. It is so much easier for a wife to submit to a husband, even when he is in error, if she knows that his motives are selfless and that he sincerely has her best interests at heart.

A wife is to submit to her husband as to the Lord. That is our first point this morning. And our second point is that she is responsible to love her family.

Titus 2:4 says "admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ..."

"Wait," you might say, "I thought love was the husband's special responsibility." That is true, but here is a point where a little knowledge of Greek is helpful. The husband's responsibility is *agape* love; the wife's responsibility mentioned here is *phileo* love. And there is a difference.

Agape love is the sort of love illustrated by Christ's love for the church. It is not love rooted in a natural affection aroused by the desirability of its object. Ezekiel 16 says that Jehovah chose Israel as His wife even though she was abandoned and bloody. Ephesians 5 says that Christ chose the church to be His bride even though she had spots, wrinkles and blemishes. *Agape* love is an undeserved love rooted only in the deliberate choice of the divine will. That is the sort of love the husband is to have for his wife once he has taken his marriage vows. His love needs to be an act of the will rooted in the unconditional commitment he made when he took his marriage vows. His love needs to be a selfless choice to sacrifice not based on any selfish motivation.

That is *agape* love, love rooted in a commitment. *Phileo* love is love rooted in the affections. You exercise *phileo* love by developing a liking for someone or a taste for something. Some women today cultivate a hatred for all men. The God-given responsibility of a wife is to cultivate a love for that one particular man, the man she married. Here is the key to doing this: pray for the grace to think upon your husband in submission to Philippians 4:8:

"... whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things."

Surely there is something praiseworthy in the person and life of the man you married. Meditate on these things, and pray for God to cultivate an affection for him in your heart.

The wife is also to love her children with the same affectionate *phileo* love. Of course, God does not give all wives the blessing of being a mother, but all wives should view being a mother as a blessing.

Wives shouldn't be like Scarlet O'Hare in "Gone with the Wind" who declares when Mammy is tightening her corset that she is not having any more children for the sake of her figure. Some couples today decide not to have any children because they want more expensive cars and more elaborate vacations. Or there is the extreme selfishness of a Susan Smith who drowns her two young sons because she thinks they are interfering with her social life. Such people are only short changing themselves.

Bearing children is a privilege God has given only to women, and He has put a special nurturing love for children in the female heart. The Bible takes it for granted that we all understand that the mother has a special affection for her own children. The Bible then uses this universally understood affection as a metaphor for deep and committed concern. In Isaiah 66:13, God says,

"As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you;
..."

And in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, the apostle Paul says:

"But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children."

More and more women today are realizing the special joys of motherhood and the special strength of the mother-child bond.

The wife is to submit to her husband, to cultivate an affection for her husband and children, and lastly she is to manage the household.

1 Timothy 5:14 says that she is to manage the house. Titus 2:5 says that she is to be a homemaker. The word in 1 Timothy is a combination of the Greek word for "house" and the Greek word from which we get the English word "despot." The idea there is that she is to be the one who has authority over the household. The husband is to delegate authority over the household to his wife the same way the Pharaoh delegated authority over Egypt to Joseph. In Genesis 49, the Pharaoh said to Joseph:

"... there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you. ... See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 41:39-41).

The word used in Titus is a combination of the Greek word for house and the Greek word for work. The idea there is that she is to do work related to maintaining a home for her husband and children. We should remember that the housewife is engaged in work just as surely as is the woman who works outside the home. Homemaking is a challenging and significant job.

This does not mean that a wife cannot work outside the home. We can see that from the description of the virtuous wife in Proverbs 31. And it doesn't mean that a husband doesn't need to help around the house. It does mean that maintaining the home life of her family should be a wife and mother's first priority.

I can help with the work around the house, and there are jobs around the house I can do better than my wife. Yet I must admit there is a such a thing as the woman's touch. There are things related to homemaking that my wife can do so much better than I. When I do them, it is like using a pipe wrench to drive a nail or using a hammer to loosen a pipe.

We have now examined the roles of both the husband and the wife. In general, the husband's responsibility is to love his wife enough to die for her. And the wife's responsibility is to respect her husband enough to live for him.

We all fall short, but we need to remember that there is forgiveness. Christ does forgive our sins when we ask Him and trust Him. And there is also deliverance and empowerment. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. We can even fulfill our God-given roles as husbands and wives.

By the power of Christ, our married life can be a sweet smelling aroma ascending before the presence of God.