

Marriage & Gender Roles

Jonathan K. Dodson | 1 Peter 3:1-7 | April 8, 2016

We've just heard the *word of God*. God's speech, which is why after the reading we say, "This is God's word for you." This means when you hear a sermon true to God's word, you have to resist judging it based on whether or not it "feels" like its for you or whether or not God's teaching happens to be controversial, in our little sliver of space and time. Instead, we listen to understand it, take God's view in like a personal vitamin, and live it; because, it really is *for you*. Marriage: A vision for it, the design behind it, in each gender role, husbands and wives.

A Vision for Marriage

What's your vision for gender? Where do you get that vision from? What most shapes your practice of femininity and masculinity, of being a husband or a wife? *Your vision of marriage vaults you into being a particular kind of woman or man*. It determines who you will become and what kind of marriage you will have. Wedding Day Pic. If your real view of marriage is restrictive and joyless, you'll be tempted to say, "It was all downhill from here! You'll look back and dream of *what used to be*." If your vision is naive and hyper-romanticized, you'll be tempted to see the wedding day as a gateway to total fulfillment and freedom from loneliness, placing a weight on your spouse they're not created to bear. But *if we embrace God's view*, the wedding day becomes a preview of what *we will become*. Standing in radiant white and youthful glow, we get a snapshot of our future radiant selves in Christ: "[Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure](#)"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev 19:7-8)." Here's a future we can actually bring into the present, if we'll embrace God's righteous design for our gendered humanity. Where do I get the gendered part? When God unfurls the heavenly picture of what he is doing with humanity, he shows us that a bride and a groom come, not from social norms or the eyes of the state, but from the archetypal marriage between "[the Lamb and his Bride](#)," marriage is between a man and a woman because the ultimate marriage is between a Man and Woman. The Bible ends in a marriage and begins in marriage between two distinct genders: "[God made man in his image...male and female he created them...and the two become one](#) (Gen 1:27;2:24)." So, beginning to end, God's grand vision for marriage is a gendered, symmetrical design. Peter shows us specific ways that design plays out. [Wives, be subject to your husbands](#) and [husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way](#). Or the parallel text in Ephesians, [Wives submit to your husbands and husbands love your wives](#). Now, in modern ears gender roles sound like a power play, a way for one sex to get the upper hand. Wives submit because they are inferior and husbands called lord because they're superior! Is this what the roles of submission and headship (used in Eph) mean? What happens when you apply the same logic to a headmaster/school principal? Say the principal sends out a notice requiring all parents to send their kids to school one hour late, you comply. Would you, because you submitted to the the principle's order, conclude you are inferior, unequal, and that he has greater worth? Peter goes out of his way to show the opposite when he says of wives "[they are co-heirs with you in the grace of life](#) (7)." Co-heirs, co-equals, both inheritors of God's future reward, both get to put on the linen bright and pure. So, in God's economy, men are not superior to

women. That's an Islamic idea not Christian one. If that were the case, then we would have to also conclude that Jesus is inferior and unequal to his Father since "[the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him](#)" (1 Cor 15:28). Submission and headship, then, are divinely designed for a greater purpose. Peter gives one purpose, "[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.](#)" He's addressing a live issue where Jewish women who marrying Greeks. When they converted to Christianity, they were at odds with the philosophical, religious views of their husbands. This wasn't permitted in Roman society. Plutarch, "[it is proper for a wife to recognize only those gods whom her husband worships and to shut the door to superstitious cults and strange superstitions.](#)" So, by addressing the wives, giving them freedom to convert, and not requiring them to leave their pagan husbands, Peter is conferring radical dignity on women, more than the culture allowed. Now, if you are in a similar position, married to someone who holds different beliefs, I hope you will take encouragement that *God doesn't require you to sacrifice your marriage and family on the altar of your faith, but rather, he wants to work through your faith to win your family to Christ.* God is for you so much that your submission fits into his redemptive design *for the world.* You get to be a lens through which people see a redeemed, dignified femininity in submission to your Redeemer!

Wives

We've considered a *vision* for marriage designed around gender roles, and the rest of our passage really works that through, mainly for women, then a little bit for men. Isn't it a bit chauvinist to address women for six verses and give only one verse to men? Well, the parallel passage in Ephesians 5 flips it, where men receive 3x the amount of instruction than wives. It's just that Peter is writing to a particular set of circumstances. Picking up in verse three, we move further into femininity: [Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.](#) Now again, this may seem backwards, but it's actually quite beautiful. Is God prohibiting fashion, jewelry, and fun haircuts? The word adorn is kosmo. Peter's saying don't settle a beauty that is purely cosmetic, on the outside. Don't objectify beauty. Instead, let it go deeper, down into **the hidden person of the heart.** *True beauty emerges from the heart. You are, in a sense, what you love.* If you love to be praised, for people to notice you, then your cosmetic will be skin deep. Shopping, dressing, speaking, living only to get noticed. But if you love God, and rest in his thoughts about you, a beauty will appear that doesn't fade with age. You gain a confidence and joy in life that radiates and fills lives. [You become like the one you love,](#) Jesus, who had a **gentle and quiet spirit.** You ever get around people who have lost a sense of self-importance; who are abandoned to something else? Who seem to take genuine interest in you? This person can be an extravert or an introvert, looks different on different people, but the thing they share in common is that they are inviting, a place to rest. Essentially he's saying, take your eyes off the magazines and billboards and take God's view, who sees the hidden person of the heart and says, now that's precious, that's beauty. Nichole Whitacre says, "[The truly beautiful woman is the one who contemplates the beauty of God. As she worships him for his loveliness, power, holiness, and goodness, she is changed.](#)" **She becomes what she loves.**

Husbands may need to repent to adopt this view of beauty. Next, Peter says, “[For this is how the holy women before hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands.](#)” “*Instead of picking out the prettiest girl in the room and marking her for resentment, look to the godliest.*” And the godliest hope, not in what single guys or husbands think but in what God thinks. And the more you hope in him, the more attractive you become, the more eager you are to affirm, respect, and support your husband. You ask him to lead you and you're patient. You don't talk over him or belittle him; you respect him, even if he's not respectable *because your submission is to the Lord. Your act of worship.*

Husbands

Now, turning to men, “[Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way](#)” (7). In our submission to Christ, we're called to “**live with**” is one word, emphasizing the importance of not merely sharing the same roof but *dwelling together*, intentionally sharing life. This means you don't flop on the couch when you get home, or pass like two ships in the night, letting work or kids push you apart. To “live with” is to refuse roommate status and insist on togetherness. How? **In an understanding way.** This doesn't mean just nod your head while your wife is talking thinking about work. But its not just saying yes to everything either. The phrase literally reads, according to knowledge. Know your wife. What are her current needs, aspiring hobbies, future dreams, present struggles and fears? Do you know? Create a habit of asking her about these things. **Show her honor as a weaker vessel.** We've already said this isn't about inequality. It probably means handle her like a precious vase. Don't be verbally rough. Be kind, tender, thoughtful. Don't treat her like a guy. This is hard and unnatural for us. Sometimes I get into management mode and start issuing orders to the kids to get the house clean, or feel passionate about a financial decision, and my love for getting something done or being right eclipses my love for my wife. I end up being short, rude and hurting her feelings. This doesn't honor her. She's not my buddy; she's my wife. The Bible doesn't give license to demand respect, submission, or to be called lord. These are things wives offer as an act of worship to God. You don't manage her worship. In the ancient context, lord was like Sir or Mr. a sign of admiration not subservience. Robie calls me Sir Dodson at home. Any time I hear my name come out of her mouth, I don't have to cringe or be curious. I know she's eager to honor me. If there's conflict, we talk through it together. Honor your wife also includes **leading her spiritually; its why there are spiritual consequences if you don't—your prayers can be hindered.** If you don't have this responsibility, and she's just a companion, then why would there be special consequences? Setting the spiritual temperature is part of your role as the Christlike head. Is your wife flourishing under your spiritual leadership? Are you leading her to corporate worship, encouragement in the gospel, praying regularly with and for her? If you are living with her in an understanding way, you'll do it and know how to do it. Youll know her needs. This sermon gives you a great opportunity to reflect and follow up with your wife. You may need to begin with confession and repentance, telling her you are sorry for serving yourself, abdicating your leadership, and turn to Christ for forgiveness and change. Husbands, we've been called to a Jesus-like role and entrusted with women he died for. Single men, start practicing now by treating women with honor and cultivating faithful communion with God. You cant lead others if you're not leading yourself. As we close, I invite you to return to the stunning vision of marriage in the Bible: [“Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made](#)

herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev 19:7-8). Marriage is not a social contract or a path to self-fulfillment. It’s signpost pointing to the marriage of the Lamb, where the Bride, men and women, adorn themselves with deeds we’ve described. Why does the Bride do this? To get the Groom to notice her, to earn her way into his love? Oh no, for “it was granted to her” to clothe herself in linen. We dress up because the Lamb was dressed down for us; we clothe ourselves in good deeds because he first clothed us in his love. We make garments from the linen Christ gave. Will you allow this vision of marriage to vault you into your future radiant self? *Marriage is for God, let us rejoice and give him the glory.*