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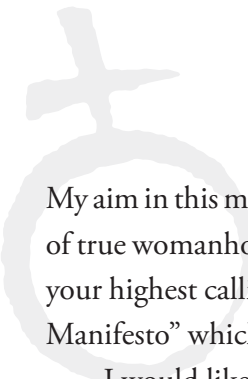
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the ultimate meaning of true womanhood

JOHN PIPER



My aim in this message is to clarify from God's Word the ultimate meaning of true womanhood, and to motivate you, by God's grace, to embrace it as your highest calling. What I will say is foundational to the "True Woman Manifesto" which I regard as a faithful, clear, true, and wise document.

I would like to begin by stating one huge assumption that I bring to this chapter. I mention it partly because it may give you an emotional sense of what I hope you become. And I mention it partly because it explains why I minister the way I do and why this message sounds the way it does.

My assumption is that *wimpy theology makes wimpy women*. And I don't like wimpy women. I didn't marry a wimpy woman. And with Noël, I am trying to raise my teenage daughter Talitha not to be a wimpy woman.

Marie Durant

The opposite of a wimpy woman is not a brash, pushy, loud, controlling, sassy, uppity, arrogant Amazon. The opposite of a wimpy woman is fourteen-year-old Marie Durant, a French Christian in the seventeenth century who was arrested for being a Protestant and told she could be released

if she said one phrase: “I abjure.” Instead, she wrote on the wall of her cell, “Resist,” and stayed there thirty-eight years until she died, doing just that.¹

Gladys and Esther Staines

The opposite of a wimpy woman is Gladys Staines who in 1999, after serving with her husband Graham in India for three decades learned that he and their two sons, Phillip (10) and Timothy (6), had been set on fire and burned alive by the very people they had served for thirty-four years, said, “I have only one message for the people of India. I’m not bitter. Neither am I angry. Let us burn hatred and spread the flame of Christ’s love.”

The opposite of a wimpy woman is her thirteen-year-old daughter Esther (rightly named!) who said, when asked how she felt about her father’s murder, “I praise the Lord that He found my father worthy to die for Him.”²

Krista and Vicki

The opposite of a wimpy woman is Krista and Vicki, friends of ours in Minneapolis, who between them have had over sixty-five surgeries because of so-called birth defects, Apert Syndrome and Hypertelorism, and who testify today through huge challenges, “I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well”; and this: “Even though my life has been difficult, I know that God loves me and created me just the way I am. He has taught me to persevere and to trust Him more than anything.”

Joni Eareckson Tada

The opposite of a wimpy woman is Joni Eareckson Tada, who has spent the last forty-one years in a wheelchair, and prays, “Oh, thank you, thank you for this wheelchair! By tasting hell in this life, I’ve been driven to think seriously about what faces me in the next. This paralysis is my greatest mercy.”³

Suzie

The opposite of a wimpy woman is Suzie, who lost her husband four years ago at age fifty-nine, found breast cancer three months later, then lost her mom and writes, “Now I see that I have been crying for the wrong kind of help. I now see that my worst suffering is my sin—my sin of self-centeredness and self-pity. . . . I know that with His grace, His lovingkindness, and His merciful help, my thoughts can be reformed and my life conformed to be more like His Son.”

Wimpy Theology Makes Wimpy Women

Wimpy theology makes wimpy women. That’s my assumption that I bring to this chapter. Wimpy theology simply does not give a woman a God that is big enough, strong enough, wise enough, and good enough to handle the realities of life in a way that magnifies the infinite worth of Jesus Christ. Wimpy theology is plagued by woman-centeredness and man-centeredness. Wimpy theology doesn’t have the granite foundation of God’s sovereignty or the solid steel structure of a great God-centered purpose for all things.

*Wimpy theology does
not give a woman a God
that is big enough.*

The Ultimate Purpose for the Universe

So I turn to my main point, the ultimate meaning of true womanhood, and start by stating this great God-centered purpose of all things:

God’s ultimate purpose for the universe and for all of history and for your life is to display the glory of Christ in its highest expression, namely, in His dying to make a rebellious people His everlasting and supremely happy bride.

To say it another way, God’s ultimate purpose in creating the world and choosing to let it become the sin-wracked world that it is, is so that the greatness of the glory of Christ could be put on display at Calvary where

He bought His rebellious bride at the cost of His life.

I base this statement of God's ultimate purpose on several texts. For example, Revelation 13:8 where John refers to God writing names "before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain." So in God's mind Christ was already slain before the creation of the world. This was His plan from the beginning. Why?

Because in being slain "to make a wretch His treasure"—to make a rebel His bride—the glory of His grace would shine most brightly, and that was His ultimate purpose according to Ephesians 1:4–6, "In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ . . . *to the praise of the glory of his grace.*"

The Glory of Christ at the Cross

From the very beginning, God's design in creating the universe and governing it the way He does has been to put the glory of His grace on display in the death of His Son for the sake of His bride. "Husbands, love your wives, *as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*, that he might sanctify her . . . that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25–27). The ultimate purpose of creation and redemption is to put the glory of Christ on display in purchasing and purifying His bride, the church.

True Womanhood: At the Center of God's Purpose

Now where does this take us in regard to the ultimate meaning of true womanhood? It does not take us to wimpy theology or wimpy women. It is not wimpy to say that God created the universe and governs all things to magnify His own grace in the death of His Son for the salvation of His bride. That's not wimpy. And it doesn't lead to wimpy womanhood.

But it does lead to womanhood. True womanhood. In fact, it leads to the mind-boggling truth that womanhood and manhood—femininity and masculinity—belong at the center of God's ultimate purpose. Wom-

anhood and manhood were not an afterthought or a peripheral thought in God’s plan. God designed them precisely so that they would serve to display the glory of His Son dying to have His happy, admiring bride.

Created to Display Jesus’ Glory

Genesis 1:27 says, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking God created us this way, and then later when Christ came to do His saving work, God looked around and said, “Well, that’s a good analogy, man and woman. I’ll describe My Son’s salvation with that. I’ll say it’s like a husband dying to save his bride.”

It didn’t happen like that. God did not look around and *find* manhood and womanhood to be a helpful

He created us as male and female precisely so that we could display the glory of His Son.

comparison to His Son’s relation to the church. He *created* us as male and female precisely so that we could display the glory of His Son. Our sexuality is designed for the glory of the Son of God—especially the glory of His dying to have His admiring bride.

In Ephesians 5:31, Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” And then he adds this, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” In other words, from the beginning, manhood and womanhood were designed to display the glory of Christ in His relationship to the church, His bride.

A Distinctive Calling to Display the Glory of Christ

In other words, the ultimate meaning of true womanhood is this: It is a distinctive calling of God to display the glory of His Son in ways that would not be displayed if there were no womanhood. If there were only generic persons and not male and female, the glory of Christ would be diminished in

the world. When God described the glorious work of His Son as the sacrifice of a husband for His bride, He was telling us why He made us male and female. He made us this way so that our maleness and femaleness would display more fully the glory of His Son in relation to His blood-bought bride.

This means that if you try to reduce womanhood to physical features and biological functions, and then determine your role in the world merely on the basis of competencies, you don't just miss the point of womanhood, you diminish the glory of Christ in your own life. True womanhood is indispensable in God's purpose to display the fullness of the glory of His Son. Your distinctive female personhood is not incidental. It exists because of its God-designed relationship to the central event of history, the death of the Son of God.

So let me say a word about what that looks like if you are married and if you are single.

A Word to the Married

First, a word to the married. Paul says in Ephesians 5:22–24, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”

The point here is that marriage is meant to display the covenant-keeping love between Christ and His church. And the way it does this is by men being men and women being women in marriage. These are no more interchangeable than Christ is interchangeable with the church. Men take their cues from Christ as the head, and women take their cues from what the church is called to be in her allegiance to Christ. This is described by Paul in terms of headship and submission. Here are my definitions of headship and submission based on this text:

- *Headship* is the divine calling of a husband to take primary responsibility for Christ-like, servant leadership, protection, and provision in the home.

- *Submission* is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts.

The point here is not to go into detail about how this gets worked out from marriage to marriage. The point is that these two, headship and submission, are different. They correspond to true manhood and true womanhood, which are different. And these differences are absolutely essential by God's design, so that marriage will display, as in a mirror dimly, something of the glory of the sacrificial love of Christ for His bride and the lavish reverence and admiration of the bride for her husband.

I know this leaves a hundred questions unanswered—about unbelieving husbands, and believing husbands who don't take spiritual leadership, and wives who resist their husbands' leadership, and those who receive it but don't affirm it. But if you—you married women—embrace the truth that your womanhood, true womanhood, is uniquely and indispensably created by God to display the glory of His Son in the way you relate to your husband, you will have a calling of infinite significance.

But what if you aren't married?

A Word to Singles

The apostle Paul clearly loved his singleness because of the radical freedom for ministry that it gave him (1 Corinthians 7:32–38). One of the reasons he was free to celebrate his singleness and call others to join him in it, is that, even though marriage is meant to display the glory of Christ, there are truths about Christ and His kingdom that shine more clearly through singleness than through marriage. I'll give you three examples:

- 1) *A life of Christ-exalting singleness bears witness that the family of God grows not by propagation through sexual intercourse, but by regeneration through faith in Christ.* If you never marry, and if you embrace a lifetime of chastity and biological childlessness, and if you receive this from the Lord's hand as a gift with contentment, and if you gather to yourself the needy and the lonely, and spend yourself for the gospel without

self-pity, because Christ has met your need, then He will be mightily glorified in your life, and particularly so because you are a woman.

2) *A life of Christ-exalting singleness bears witness that relationships in Christ are more permanent, and more precious, than relationships in families.* The single woman who turns away from regretting the absence of her own family, and gives herself to creating God's family in the church, will find the flowering of her womanhood in ways she never dreamed, and Christ will be uniquely honored because of it.

3) *A life of Christ-exalting singleness bears witness that marriage is temporary, and finally gives way to the relationship to which it was pointing all along: Christ and the church—the way a picture is no longer needed when you see face-to-face.* Marriage is a beautiful thing. But it is not the main thing. If it were, Jesus would not have said, “In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Matthew 22:30). Single womanhood, content to walk with Christ, is a great witness that He is a better husband than any man, and in the end, will be the only husband in the universe.

In other words, true womanhood can flourish in marriage and singleness.

True Womanhood for the Glory of Christ

I commend to you this truth: The ultimate purpose of God in history is the display of the glory of His Son in dying for His bride. God has created man as male and female because there are aspects of Christ's glory which would not be known if they were not reflected in the complementary differences of manhood and womanhood. Therefore, true womanhood is a distinctive calling of God to display the glory of His Son in ways that would not be displayed if there were no womanhood.

Married womanhood has its unique potential for magnifying Christ that single womanhood does not have. Single womanhood has its unique potential for magnifying Christ which married womanhood does not have.

So whether you marry or remain single, do not settle for a wimpy theology. It is beneath you. God is too great. Christ is too glorious. True womanhood is too strategic. Don't waste it. Your womanhood—your true womanhood—was made for the glory of Jesus Christ.