

Introduction...

One of the greatest gifts that God has ever given to man is a wife and one of the greatest gifts that God has ever given to woman is a husband. In the days of creation when God made Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden to be together He looked on what He had made and declared it **very** good. God has made some amazing things and He has given us some amazing gifts, but the greatest gift, apart from Christ Himself, is the man or woman sitting beside you right now.

As the creation narrative unfolds we see that this gift wasn't lost on Adam. When he first laid eyes on Eve his response was that he started singing. Adam became a poet the moment he saw his wife because he knew that she was a gift like no other. **But it didn't take long for this gift to become corrupted by sin.**

The marriage relationship of a man and a woman, as wonderful as God intended it to be, has taken a hit. It was in **Genesis 3** when Adam and Eve rebelled against God that sin entered into the world and into human hearts and as a result the marriage relationship has been troubled ever since. And it's not just the marriage relationship that has been affected, our entire home life is still reeling from the effects of sin.

But there is hope because ***the gospel mends broken relationships***. That's what we've been studying these past few weeks in Colossians 3. Through Christ our relationship to God that was broken because of sin has now been restored by faith and not by works. Through Christ we are not who we once were, we are dead to sin and have the life of God flowing through us.

Christ has mended our relationship to God, He has given us the power to mend our relationship to one another in the church and He has given us the power to resurrect a broken marriage and the relationship that are broken within the home.

Transition...

You see the gospel not only has something to say about our relationship to God, our relationship to one another in the church; it also bears its weight on our home. So this morning we are going to look at Colossians 3:18-19 verses where God gives instruction on how the gospel shapes the relationship between a husband and wife.

Col 3:18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. **19** Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. **20** Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. **21** Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. **22** Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. **23** Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, **24** knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. **25** For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

4 Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Before we really begin to dissect the text here I want to say something about the scope of this sermon and I want to say something to those among us who are not married. First this sermon is not intended to cover every detail of the marriage relationship. The context of Colossians is quite limited and each piece of instruction about the Christian home is given in one verse statements. But this passage is not the only one that addresses the roles of men and women in the home.

Back in **October and November of 2014** I preached a 5-part series on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood so if you are interested in going deeper into this subject I would encourage you to go to our website and dig up that sermon audio. There are also a host of good books that have been written on the subject and we have several of them in our library. One of my favorites came out last year written by Ray Ortlund titled ***Marriage and Mystery of the Gospel***.

To those of you who are single I want you to know that these truths are important for all of God's people in that they reveal the wisdom of God and the power of the gospel to affect all of our relationships. It may be that you are young and not yet married and these verses will speak to your heart in such a way that they prepare you for a grace-filled and gospel rich marriage in the future. I pray that would be the case.

But it may also be that you are single for some other reason. I want to remind you that you are not loved by God any less because of your singleness. I want you to know that I love you, that your church family loves you and needs you because you are a precious child of God and dearly loved member of this church family.

Sermon Focus...

In this passage, Paul turns his attention from the spiritual family (ie. The church) to the physical family in what is often called the "household codes" because it deals with the essential relationships that were common in a 1st century household. This kind of teaching was common in the Greco-Roman world. For the Greeks and Romans this type of instruction wasn't religious at all but rather it came from the realm of philosophy.

Aristotle divided the household into three essential relations: master and slave, husband and wife, the parent and child. So instruction for the home life was "in the air" and because the gospel affects all of our relationships, it makes sense that Paul would want to address how it affects the home. In a sense, Paul is saying, "Yes these are the essential relationships in a 1st century household, but the gospel is going to influence those relationships in a distinct and countercultural way."

And as we work through this we will see that the relational dynamics addressed here are to reflect a distinctly Christian spirit. The gospel doesn't erase our existing social relationship but it does transform them and the question is how? ***Let's look first at the relationship of a wife to her husband.***

I. A Word to Wives...

Col 3:18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Now, right out of the gate I know that this is troubling and uncomfortable for many of you. The idea of submission seems archaic and degrading, which causes a lot of women to simply reject what the Bible teaches on this subject. But I want to suggest two things: 1. That Submission might not mean what we think it means and 2. That God wants to lead us into a relational dynamic that is better than what we could come up with on our own.

God designed marriage in the beginning, it was His idea and the instruction that we see throughout the Bible is not meant to suck the joy out of our lives and our marriage but is instead meant to lead us into greater joy in marriage.

Submission is not servile groveling at the feet of a domineering husband. Submission in the home is ultimately to be a reflection of the Church's submission to Christ, which is the most grace-fueled

and loving relationship in the world. At the same time, this picture of the Christian home is about God restoring peace into our lives that was lost in the Fall. God is not taking something away from us but is instead giving us something that we never even knew we could have.

So, before we reject what this verse says let's work to try and understand what it actually means. This verse is almost identical to what we read in **Ephesians 5:22** and the first part of **1 Peter 3:1**, meaning that this instruction for wives is consistent throughout the NT. But what exactly does this word submit mean? And how should we view this role?

The term submit here means the voluntary recognition of a divinely ordered structure. For wives to submit to their husbands means that they are voluntarily and humbly putting themselves under their own husband's leadership because she recognizes that God has ordered the home in this way. The same word is used all over the NT to describe different forms of submission that takes place in the world. We are to submit to God. We are to submit to one another. Christians are to submit to governing authorities. Members of the church are to submit to their leaders. In each category the term means a recognition of an established order of authority as determined by God.

Now, this call to submit does not negate all of the other promises, blessings and responsibilities that belong to Christian women. You are a dearly loved daughter of God and you should be treated with dignity, honor, respect and love by all Christian men, but especially your husband. So this instruction about submission to your husband is not degrading to you nor does it give the husband a green light to treat you like a doormat.

But at the same time we need to recognize that submission is not the natural posture of our sinful heart. The natural posture of our hearts is to seek our own way, not God's way. Our natural inclination is not to submission but to domination, which means that Christ is calling us to something here that flows out of our relationship to Him. And just so we don't get tunnel vision, this type of submission is to sweeten and flavor *the entire Christian community*.

Eph 5:20 give thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The presence of Jesus among us should lead us to serve one another, to outdo one another in showing honor, should lead us to humbly count others as more significant than ourselves (**Phil 2:3**). Submission and servanthood are to be a hallmarks of the entire church.

But then for the wife in particular, God calls you to live out this Christian heart of submission and servanthood toward your husband as toward no other. Paul is urging women to submit to their own husbands and submission does not mean weakness. Godly submission may be one of the strongest personal character qualities in the world. It takes great strength of character as well as great humility to submit to another person out of love and that is what Paul is calling for here.

But submission does not mean inferiority either. Jesus submitted to the Father and that does not mean that Jesus was inferior. Jesus willingly assumed a position of responsibility by submitting to the authority of His Father.

And when we carry that over we learn that the Christian calling upon the wife is to *voluntary submission* to her own husband with godly wisdom and dignity, not blind obedience to an unbelieving tyrant. In other words, this is not absolute submission to a man but willing submission based on one's faith in Christ. The final phrase in this verse makes clear that a Christian wife's submission is ultimately to flow out of her love for Christ.

Ok, so what does this look like? A submissive wife is going to be supportive and respectful of her husband. A wise wife is going to think for herself and communicate with her husband her thoughts, desires and fears. She will at times disagree with her husband and seek to add her counsel to the situation in a respectful way. But in the end she seeks to let her submission to her husband be a reflection of her submission to Christ (**Eph 5**). She will follow her husband's lead and support him as he assumes the responsibility that God has placed on him within the family.

“By trusting the Lord and embracing her calling, a Christian wife empowers her husband as no one else on the face of the earth can do. She is so secure in Christ that she is no longer jealous to establish her own identity separate from her husband. She understands how profound it is to be one flesh with him, and she gives him her whole heart and her practical support.” **Ray Ortlund** (*Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel*, pg. 94)

Jesus sets us free to be truly human and he teaches us to express ourselves according to God's design, which is not to grapple for control but to serve one another in love. Submission is about humble service, loving support, and mutual respect that both honors God and leads us into joy.

There's more. The role of wives in the Christian home is intended to have a companion and that is the role of the husband.

II. A Word to Husbands...

19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

In the Greco-Roman world of the early church it would have been mildly counter-cultural for wives to submit to their husbands. In all honesty, Roman wives were expected to assume a position of obedience not unlike a slave. So Paul's instruction for Christian wives is much different. But the requirement for husbands to sacrificially love their wives was completely unheard of in Paul's day. Here again is a uniquely Christian emphasis being placed on the family dynamic.

The call for Christians to love one another is widely taught in the NT. Our first duty is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our second duty is to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are to love one another, we are to love our neighbors, we are even to love our enemies. **And this call to love is rooted in the love that we have been shown by Christ.** He loved us while we were still sinners. He loves us even though we are constantly unworthy of love. He loved us to the point of death on the cross and He will love us forever.

His love fuels our love and as husbands we have been given one human relationship where our love is to be most keenly directed and that is toward our wives. And notice that this is not a love that stays bottled up in our hearts as a feeling but is a love that we express. Paul tells us that our treatment of our wives is to be characterized by sacrificial love and not harshness. In other words, our leadership in the home is not to be carried out in such a way that it leads to bitterness in our wives. We are to be gentle, humble, respectful and are to love our wives in such a way that we make it easy for them to respect and support us.

Men, our wives are real human beings made in the image of God and they are our sisters in Christ. Loving our wives will often mean that we put her interests ahead of our own. In fact, we see another parallel here to **Ephesians 5:25** “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” **The love that we have for our wives is to be a reflection of the love that Christ has for us; a patient love, a tender love, a unique love, a lasting love and a sacrificial love.**

When we trust the Lord and embrace our calling as Christian husbands, we are going to strive to love our wives like Christ loves us. We are going to sacrifice our wants and needs in order to serve, honor, respect and love our wives. This is what Christ did for the church. He laid aside His own glory and power in order to meet the needs of His people. Men this is what we are called to in relationship with our wives. To love them like Christ.

Brothers, you aren't called to simply put up with your wives but to cherish them, to actively love them the way Christ loves us. We don't treat our wives like servants but like sisters in the Lord and the most precious gift of God this side of the gospel.

(Appli...Husbands, be sensitive to **your** wife's needs and her feelings. Learn what helps her to feel loved and don't forget. Probe her heart to the point that you know her well and understand what her spiritual as well as physical needs are and then live with her in such a way that you meet those needs and honor your wife.

Now before we take this too far I want us to remember that there is a sense in which we as husbands will not be able to meet our wife's deepest needs. Only Christ can fulfill the deep needs of our souls so let's not carry this verse out to an absurd conclusion. I cannot save my wife from sin, I cannot ultimately fulfill my wife in all the ways she wants or needs to be fulfilled because that role belongs to Christ alone, **but I must strive to know her well and love her well.**

- When I speak in such a way that it hurts her feelings and she tells me that, I need to listen and learn.
- When I hold her in such a way that she feels safe and loved, I need to remember that and do it more often.
- When she goes out of her way to show me love and respect I need to recognize that and honor her for it.
- When I come home from my meetings at the end of a long day and I recognize that she's worn out from her day as well I need to show her the same respect that I would want her to show me.
- When you recognize that your wife needs some time away from the kids make it happen for her.
- When things go completely sideways and you don't understand what your wife is going through emotionally, or you don't know what to do to **"fix it"**; be patient, work hard to listen, and practice simply being there for her.

Conclusion...

Col 3:18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

To both the husband and the wife let's be honest and say that this is going to take some work. This isn't going to happen overnight and it isn't going to happen because we demand it from one another. By the way, my love for my wife is not dependent upon her submission, nor vice versa. Each of us has a responsibility to walk in this and our ultimate obedience is to Jesus. I love my wife because she is lovely and loveable, but ultimately I love my wife because Christ calls me to love my wife.

My wife seeks to honor, respect and submit to me not because I am imminently worthy of those things, but because she loves the Lord and wants to be faithful to Him. We want to be faithful to the Lord, we want to relate to one another in a godly way, and we want the gospel to bear fruit in our home. That starts with the husband and the wife.

God has a purpose for how our family life is to be structured. There are patterns of authority and submission, leadership and obedience that God intends us to embrace as born again people. It would be wrong to assume that these principles are outdated and don't need to be accepted. It would be wrong for us to assume that since many of us grew up in Christian homes that we already know what this should look like.

Rather, we should study this passage and the others that correspond to it (**Ephesians 5, I Peter 3, and Titus 2**). We should seek to understand how God is calling us to live with one another and to how to treat one another. We need to examine our own lives, our own relationships and our own homes. We need to seek forgiveness from one another where we have failed and then with humility and patience we need to seek to let the gospel invade our family.

Let me encourage you to sit down and talk with one another about this. Open up your Bibles, pray for God's help and patience, then begin to talk about what this can and should look like in your home. If you have really blown it then own that and seek forgiveness, but also seek to grow in your God-given responsibility. Ask questions. Be a good listener and pray that God would help you both to grow in your roles.