

Colossians 3:18-19

“Wives and Husbands”

Sermon

Tim Black

1.

Introduction

1.

Having taught us to have a Christian worldview and to put on Christian character, Paul

now teaches us our obligations in Christian relationships

. He speaks of the relationships between wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters, bringing biblical order and unity to a race divided by gender, age, and economics.

2.

Most commentaries consider this whole section to be about the Christian family, or the Christian household, including Paul's exhortations to slaves and masters. We commonly think of Paul's exhortations to slaves and masters as having more direct bearing on the modern workplace than on the modern family, but in Paul's day many slaves were household servants, so while Paul's exhortations touch on the workplace they are directed primarily to the household.

3.

Within the household, the relationship in which it is of paramount importance for us to live out Christian character is the marriage relationship. All other relationships in the household hang on the foundation laid by the husband and wife.

4.

Because Paul speaks of the marriage relationship similarly in Ephesians 5:22-33, we should consider the similarities and differences between the two passages.

1.

Similarities with Ephesians

1.

Centrality of union with Christ. In both epistles, Paul teaches that our actions as a husband or wife should flow from our union with Christ. Christ's centrality to Paul's exhortations is evident in his statement “

[as is fitting in the Lord](#)

” in

v. 18

and his similar statements in verses

20

,

22-24

, and

4:1

.

2.

Paul transforms Greek ethics. It was common from Aristotle (4th C BC) onward in Greek ethical literature for instructions to be given about household relationships in the form of instructions to husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves. Paul uses this same form of instruction but fills it with uniquely Christian content.

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Specifically, because you have been raised with Christ, and are now seated with Him in glory, set your minds and affections on Him. Treat your spouse as one who is now united to Christ, the Savior of your soul.

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Through Christ God is now renewing you by conforming you to the image of God.

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The result is that the Lordship of Christ extends to all of life, and you should recognize and serve Christ as your Lord in all of your life, including your marriage.

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Differences from Ephesians.

1.

Length of husbands/wives section. In Ephesians, Paul inserts his teaching about our union with Christ in his words

to husbands, making them longer than his words to wives. In Colossians, Paul inserts similar instructions about union with Christ not in the section addressing husbands and wives, but in the section addressing slaves and masters. So here in Colossians, Paul's words to both husbands and wives are of equal length, of identical structure, and so are recognizably presenting equally important obligations

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2.

Length in general. Paul's words in Colossians are more brief than in Ephesians. In part this is because Paul's instructions follow from his whole book—husbands and wives are fellow partakers of God's grace in Christ. The whole book of Colossians, and more broadly, the whole Bible, thus provides a sound basis for a biblical marriage manual. If Genesis 1-3 provides the Bible's blueprints for marriage, Ephesians 5:22-33 the mission statement, and the Song of Solomon the romance novella, then these brief, pithy exhortations in Colossians are the memorable motto

you should be able to quote by heart.

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Matthew Henry comments, "The epistles which are most taken up in displaying the Lord Jesus, are the most

particular and distinct in pressing the duties of the several relations. We must never separate the privileges and duties of the gospel religion.”^{[1](#)}

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Outline Paul expresses the duties of both wives and husbands in an identical form, which is outlined as follows:

1.

Addressees

2.

Command

3.

Nuance (to the command)

1.

Body

1.

Wives v. 18

1.

Text

1.

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

2.

Addressees: Wives

1.

The addressees in this verse are “[Wives](#).”

2.

The Greek word can be used to refer to women generally and not only to wives in particular. The same is true of the Greek word used for “[husbands](#).” But here these terms must be referring specifically to husbands and wives, because they are used in conjunction with each other, placed in a special relationship of authority, and in the broader context of a discussion of the relationship of children with their parents.

3.

This means the addressees are women who are *married*. This passage does not directly teach that all women are to evidence a general submissive spirit toward all men, but its concern is specifically to speak about the relationship between a husband and a wife.

4.

Command: Submit

1.

The command Paul gives wives in this verse is “submit to your husbands.”

2.

Essential equality. This submission does not destroy, but is grounded upon the essential equality husbands and wives have as equally made in the image of God and given the mandate to “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, [and] have dominion over” the creatures.

3.

**The nature of this submission
(followed by: basis & ch
allenge
)**

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Word. The Greek word for
“submit” is u`pota,ssw (

hupotasso

), meaning literally, to be
“under” “an ordered structure.”

2

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Authority structure. It can refer to being unwillingly placed in subjection to someone else, or being subject to them willingly, which is the case in this verse. The “ordered structure” in view is undeniably the structure of authority that exists between a husband and a wife where the husband is first in order of leadership. The word normally implies that the

structure's order is a
good
and
beneficial
order.

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Illustration. That this verb normally has in view an authority structure is illustrated in **Lu ke 7:8**

, where the Roman centurion splits the two parts of this verb, “

u`po

” (

hupo

) and “

ta,ssw

” (

tasso

), and places the word “

authority

” between them.

Literally, the centurion says,

“

I too am a man

under

authority

placed

”

▪

-

Two aspects. The centurion also explains two aspects of what it means to submit to the authority under which you have been placed.

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Obedience. First, it means that you render perfect and complete obedience

to the commands of those placed over you in authority. The centurion says, “

I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and

to my servant, 'Do this,'
and he does it.

” You may think Paul
does not require wives to
give the same sort of
obedience as that of a
soldier, but notice that the
centurion says the kind
of authority is the same as
that which Christ has--“

I too

am a man under
authority

”--and Christ highly praises
this centurion for
understanding Christ’s
authority this way--“

I tell you, not even in Israel
have I found
such faith

▪
” And so Paul says in
Eph. 5:24

“
,
As the church submits to
Christ, so also wives should

submit
in everything
to their husbands.

” This submission
should be willing, joyful, and
without complaint.

-

Empowerment.

Second, the centurion's
position under authority

places him in authority over other people. By virtue of her submission to her husband, in the kingdom of her household a wife is not a servant, but the queen. When she marries, she gains a husband, and a household, and soon enough may begin overseeing children, babysitters, plumbers, and

boys who mow the lawn.
Submission to her
husband is the beginning
of her right exercise of
authority within her
household. “

One who is faithful in a
very little is also faithful in
much.

” (

Luke 16:10

)

Col. 3:18-19 - Wives and Husbands

Written by Tim Black

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1.

**The basis of this
submission**

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The basis of this submission is the authority structure God ordained in marriage when He created Adam and Eve. As grounds for his saying in **1 Cor. 11:3** that

“

the head of a wife is her

husband,

” Paul refers in

vv. 8-9

to the fact that Adam was created first, and that Eve was created to be a helper suitable for him.

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1 Corinthians

11:8-9 8 For man was
not made from
woman, but woman from
man. 9 Neither was
man created for
woman, but woman for
man.

-

Because Adam was created first, God expected Eve to listen to and follow him. This is the same reason Paul gives in **1 Tim. 2:13-14**, where he adds that while Adam was given

the leadership in creation, he was not followed in the transgression. Eve did not follow her husband and the Lord, but herself and the Serpent.

1.

The challenge of this submission

-

Hence the challenge of this submission is that out of her sinfulness a wife will not want to obey her husband's godly commands. She will want to rebel against it. Hence in the curse,

God told the woman
that her “de
sire

will be for your
husband, and he will
rule over you.

” This word for
desire does not indicate
desire that springs from
love, but desire that
wants to dominate and

destroy, as it is also
used in Gen.

4:7

as God said to Cain, “
Sin is crouching at
the door. Its
desire

is for you, but you
must rule over it.

”

Col. 3:18-19 - Wives and Husbands

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1.

**Reason and
limitation: As is
fitting in the Lord**

1.

Paul nuances this
command by giving

the reason for it,
indicating
something of the
beauty and the limits
of this submission,
when he says

-

Colossians **3:18** [a](#)

s is fitting in the Lord.

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**The beauty of this
submission**

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First, this
submission is
beautiful.

-

Many today think

submission,
subjection, is
necessarily an
old-fashioned idea,
and really an
unhealthy way of
relating. That it is
slavish, servile. But
here Paul says this
submission is “fitti

ng”

The word “

fitting

” m

eans it “measures

to the right extent or

distance.” It “comes

up” to the right

place. “It fits on” a

person or

obligation, duty, role.
It's appropriate. Just
as we should “

clothe

” ourselves with
humility, which is a
Christian virtue that
“fits” the new man
God has made us to
be in Christ, so a

wife's submission
as a form of humility
“fits” the position she
now has “
in the Lord
.” Such
submission is not at
odds with the Lord
whose submission to
His Father worked

her redemption. It is not at odds with her husband's God-ordained authority. But it is in becoming harmony with both the Lord and her husband. Her submission is

beautiful
representation of the
union between Christ
and the church.

—

The limits of this submission

-

The limits of this submission are called to mind by Paul's words "as is fitting in the Lord." The Lord remains our ultimate and highest authority. If

a husband
requires his wife to
disobey God's
commands, t
he limitation that
“

We must obey
God rather than man
”
always applies.

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1.

Husbands v. 19

1.

Text

1.

Colossians 3:19

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

2.

**Addressees:
Husbands**

1.

Paul addresses husbands similarly in v. 19, indicating they have equally important and binding obligations toward

their wives.

2.

Command: Love

1.

Paul's command
to you husbands is
that you must "love
your wives

”

■

2.

**The nature of
this love**

-

Interestingly,
Paul does not tell
husbands to “rule
over” their wives,
which we might
expect to be the
godly opposite of
submission.
That rule is

certainly implied
by the wife's
obligation to
submit, and is
taught in the rest
of scripture. But
Paul focuses
rather on the
special nature of

the husband's
treatment of his
wife—the husband
must “love” his
wife. What the
husband ought to
do, and what his
wife most
needs, is not first

for the husband to
exercise authority
, but for him to “
love
” his wife. His
exercise of
authority must be
loving, or it is
worth nothing

to the apostle
Paul.

—

While a wife's
submission also

ought
t to flow from her
love for her
husband, and a
husband should
rule as well as
love, she is
exhorted to “

submit

,” and he to “

love

.” Her
challenge will be
to follow his
authority; his
challenge will

be to exercise
authority in a
loving manner.
This implies
that his need is
more to be
followed than to
be loved, and her

need is more to
be loved than to
be ruled.

—

For those of
you who are
married, it goes
without saying
that the hearts
and minds of men

do not work the
same way as the
hearts and
minds of women.
And here Paul
gives you advice
about the best
way you can

minister to your
wife's mind and
heart—love
her!

—

Treat her with
kindness, with
tender and
faithful affection.

Recognize
that she is your
nearest relation,
and short of

the salvation of
your soul, she is
the greatest
comfort and
blessing God has
given you in your
life. This
means you need

to be patient with
her, “generous,
utterly
self-forgetting
and
self-sacrificing,
demanding
nothing,

grudging nothing,
giving all, not
shirking from the
extreme of
suffering and pain
and death itself,”
in order to bless
and build up

and care for your wife, for “such was the Lord’s love to His bride, [and] such is to be a Christian husband’s love to his wife.”

3

1.

**The extent of
this love**

—

The full extent
of this love is
that it demands
total
self-sacrifice. In
Eph. 5:25 Paul

says “Husbands,
love your
wives, as Christ
loved the church
and gave himself
up for her.

” The extent of
Christ’s love was

that he gave
up His life, and
Christian
husbands must
be willing to do
the same for
their wives.

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1.

The challenge of this love

—

The
challenge
husbands face,
then, is that they
are tempted
either more

actively to
oppress their
wives, or more
passively to
abdicate their
leadership role.

—

Prohibition: Not be bitter toward them

1.

Paul nuances
this command
for husbands to
love their wives
by specifying
one form in
which
husbands can

manifest a lack
of this love. He
says,

—

Colossians

3:19 and do
not be harsh
with them.

—

This word
“harsh” is more
literally, “bitter.”

At its core,
the word refers
to a bad taste in
your stomach,

as it is used

in

Rev. 10:9

■
■

—

Revelation

10:9 So I went
to the angel
and told him
to give me the
little scroll. And
he said to me,

“Take and
eat it; it will
make your
stomach bitter,
but in your
mouth it will
be sweet as

honey.”

—

But the word
is commonly
used to
indicate a
harsh feeling
and attitude
toward others,

which is its
meaning here.
If you harbor
bitter thoughts
and feelings
toward your
wife, eventually

you will
express them
toward her.
That bitter
taste in your
stomach will
come out into

the open. The
more you are
harsh with her
on the
inside, the
more you will
become harsh

with her on the
outside.

Your unfulfilled
evil desires on
the inside are
what will
make you bitter

toward your
wife, and are
what will lead
to anger,
wrath, malice,
slander, harsh
language, and

severe
treatment of
any sort, which
Paul warns you
against in this
verse. This
sort of

harshness
toward your
wife cannot
coexist with
biblical love for
your wife.

—

Paul's
prohibition of
harshness
here indicates

the distinctively
tender
nature of a
wife's heart. 1
Pet. 3:7

says that the
wife is the “

weaker

vessel

” in a

marriage, and

for that reason

husbands

should show

them a special
honor, and
live with their
wives in an
understanding
way.

Husbands, you

need to
recognize that
your wife's
spiritual,
emotional, and
even physical
well-being is

uniquely
dependent on
your
compassion,
kindness,
humility,
gentleness,

and patience.

-

The more
you put on

Christian
character and
love your wife
with the love
Christ has for
His church, the
more you will

open the door
for your wife
to gladly and
willingly submit
to you.

—

Alexander
Maclaren
comments,
“Where there
is such love,

there will be
no question
of mere
command and
obedience, no
tenacious
adherence

to rights, or
jealous
defence of
independence.
Law will be
transformed
into choice.

To obey will be
joy; to serve,
the natural
expression of
the heart.

Love uttering a
wish speaks

music to love
listening; and
love obeying
the wish is free
and a
queen.”4

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Conclusion

1.

Let us ask
our Lord to
give us the
godly desire to
submit to our
husbands,
and to love

our wives.

1 Matthew
Henry, 765.

2 BAGD 1042
defines its

sense, “Of submission involving recognition of an ordered structure.”

3Alexander
Maclaren, 339.

4Alexander Maclaren, 339.