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.

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 & challenge)

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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 **Luke 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

”

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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.

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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

)

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.

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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

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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 “ desire 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."

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

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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.

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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.

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The limits of this submission

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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.

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

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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.

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While a wife’s submission also

ough
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.

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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!

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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.”

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1.

The extent of this love

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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.

1.

The challenge of this love

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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.

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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,

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Colossians

3:19 and do not be harsh with them.

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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

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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."

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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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.”

3 Alexander Maclaren, 339.

4 Alexander Maclaren, 339.