

Shaped by the Gospel: Marriage
Colossians 3:18-19

Intro:

- **Particularly difficult topic of marriage this morning.** It is difficult for many reasons. It is difficult because marriage is that relationship where many hurts occur. Hurt in marriage affects not only one or two people but has a ripple affect across a whole family system.

Having said that, some of us, like me, might have experienced the tragedy of divorce. I am a child of divorce . . .

Perhaps you have experienced the pain of divorce yourself. I have many very close friends who have had to go through that.

Perhaps you are here and you are not married and you think this may not apply to you. Wherever you are on the spectrum of marriage, God's Word always has something to say to us.

It is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will pour out the grace and mercy of God through teaching, admonishment, correction, comfort and mercy this morning no matter where you are in regard to marriage. The beautiful thing about the gospel is that grace found in the person and work of Christ begins to reverse the effects of the Fall that occurred in the Garden of Eden.

- **Colossians 3:18-4:1 is the section of the letter where Paul lays out gospel pursuits in the Christian household.** This morning we are going to cover **vv. 18-19** on the charges to the husbands and wives or basically the marriage relationship. Just like in the first century cultural influences on the marriage and family were strong. As the gospel grew and people placed their faith in Christ it redefined their lives as they began to be shaped by the gospel and of all the things the Holy Spirit could have said through Paul, He said **vv. 18-19**.
- **I have done a lot of premarital and marriage counseling over the years and I use specific inventories and prescribe lots of books to couples but the one factor that will determine success in marriage is how well the couple understands and applies the gospel to their own hearts.** Truly if this is done well many marriages will wrestle and struggle well as the gospel begins to grow in the husband's heart and the wife's heart. Having said that here are the two points we will look at in our verses this morning . . .
- **Two points this morning:**
 1. The gospel transforms how a wife submits to her husband.
 2. The gospel transforms how a husband loves his wife.

I. The gospel transforms how a wife submits to her husband. (v. 18)

"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."

- **The Greek word for SUBMIT in v. 18 is *hypotasso*,** which is an active word that means to "*to submit ones self*." The submission Paul is calling for here in **v. 18** is a willing submission that is done in Christ. So let's talk about what it means for wives to submit to their husbands *as is fitting in the Lord*.
- **First we must clear the air about what submission is.** Our culture creates a lot of fog about what submission is. It prefers to define it for us but what does the word submission, in **v. 18**, mean? Let me try to clear up some misconceptions of biblical submission by saying what *submission is not*. Sometimes to define something we have to say what it is not.
- **What submission is not:**
 - **Submission does not mean inferiority.**

- It does not mean blind obedience by which a wife has checked her brain at the wedding altar.
- It does not mean agreeing with everything her husband says.
- It does not mean mere compliance by which she complies externally but inwardly is complaining. *Genuine biblical submission is an attitude of the heart. It is glad hearted and rests its faith not in the husband but in the Lord. It runs counter to outward compliance but inwardly the heart is angry about submission. It does not respond with, "Well I must submit to my husband's wishes" in a defiant or perhaps mocking voice. This is not biblical submission that is fitting as in the Lord.*¹
- On the other hand, it does not mean avoiding every effort to change your husband. For example, if your husband is not a Christian you will want to see him come to Christ.
- It does not mean putting the will of the husband before the will of Christ. A wife does not have to submit when a husband is trying to lead her into sin. A husband's authority is not above Christ's authority.
- It does not mean the wife gets her personal, spiritual strength primarily through her husband. A husband is not a substitute messiah.
- Another misconception regarding submission is the idea that the one in authority is also required to mutually submit. The idea of mutual submission is an egalitarian idea and runs counter to biblical revelation. The argument for mutual submission is taken from **Ephesians 5:21** but is misapplied to the context.

Context, context, context always helps us interpret Scripture. So what we must do is keep reading in the context of when Paul is covering relationships in the Christian family. So . . . when we get to **Ephesians 6:1-8** no one interprets the passages on parenting-children and slaves-masters with the idea of mutual submission. **Ephesians 5:21** does not mean mutual submission in marriage *but it does mean to consider the needs of the other person.*

Application:

- **Here is the proper way to understand submission:** *"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. It's the disposition to follow a husband's authority and an inclination to yield to his leadership. It is an attitude that says, 'I delight for you to take the initiative in our family. I am glad when you take responsibility for things and lead with love. I don't flourish in the relationship when you are passive and I have to make sure the family works.'*

[He goes on to say] The reason I say that submission is a disposition and an inclination to follow a husband's lead is because there will be times in a Christian marriage when the most submissive wife, with good reason, will hesitate at a husband's decision. It may look unwise to her.

*Suppose I am about to decide something for the family that looks foolish to her. At that moment, she could express her submission like this: "I know you've thought a lot about this, and I love it when you take the initiative to plan for us and take the responsibility like this, but I really don't have peace about this decision and I think we need to talk about it some more. Could we? Maybe tonight sometime?"*²

- **Let me summarize it this way.** Submission for wives does not mean inferiority and it does not mean the wife is not equal before God. We can say it this way; husbands and wives are equal before God but different by His design. He has given us different roles in the marriage and family.

¹ Ibid, 35.

² John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper (2000-2007)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

For the wife, submission is a divine calling to submit to God through Christ and for the wife to submit to her husband's Christ-like loving leadership. Submission is a God-honoring attitude and disposition of the heart and will.

II. The gospel transforms how a husband is to love his wife (v. 19)

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

- **The gospel not only changed how submission works itself out in marriage but it also is a call for husbands to radically love their wives.** In first century culture, whether Jewish or Gentile household, the husband did not have to love anyone in his family. Everything revolved around him, his plans and what he wanted.
- **In first century pagan culture marriage was a farce.** Prominent Greek statesman and orator of ancient Athens, Demosthenes, said, *"We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately."* Similarly the Greek historian Xenophon said that it was the husband's aim that a wife *"might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible and ask as little as possible."*³
- **The first century Jews fared a little better in marriage but not much.** Jewish marriages were highly influenced by the Hillel school of thought. Hillel was an ultra liberal school that taught that a Jewish man could divorce his wife for anything. For example if she over salted the food or if she no longer was attractive to him he simply divorced her. The message God sent through the Apostle Paul called men into account. As the heads of their household men were to love their wives not use them, nor neglect them and certainly not divorce them.
- **Transition:** The gospel transforms the husband's role in the marriage. **Colossians 3:19** says the husband is called to love his wife and not be harsh with her.
- **How should a husband love his wife?** To help us answer that question we are going to look at **Ephesians 5:25-33**.

A. Husbands should have a sacrificial love for their wives. (Ephesians 5:25)

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

- **Verse 25 teaches us that marriage is first and foremost about the cross, about Jesus dying in place of sinners, about his atonement for sins on the cross, about the gospel.** This is a charge for husbands to love like Jesus loved sinners (the church). How did he love? Let's consider how Jesus loves sinners.
- **"Love" is Paul's key word for Christian husbands, just as "submit" is his key word for Christian wives.** It is not a verb to be taken lightly.

What does sacrificial love look like? German pastor and author **Walter Trobisch's (Tro-biss)** says this about v. 25: *"Let me try to tell you what it really should mean if a fellow says to a girl, 'I love you.' It means: You, you, you, you alone shall reign in my heart. You are the one whom I have longed for, without you I am incomplete. I will give everything for you, and I will give up everything for you, myself as well as all that I possess. I will love you alone, and I will work for you alone. And I will wait for you. ... I will never force you, not even by words. I want to guard you, protect you and keep you from all evil. I want to share with you all my thoughts, my heart and my body—all that I possess. I want to listen to what you have to say. There is nothing I want to undertake without your blessing. I want to remain always at your side."*

This kind of sacrificial love like blesses a wife and it is only learned only at the feet of Jesus Christ.⁴

³ Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, 1990, p.190.

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 200.

- The second thing we see in this v. 25 is that *Christ "gave himself up" for the church (v. 25)*. The full measure of Christ's love for the church was his dying for her.

Do you know what our marriages need today? They need husbands who are pressing into their marriage relationship with an infusion of the stubborn grace of Christ that says, *"I love you no matter what happens or what you do."*

- **Romans 5:8 says**, *"... but God showed his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us."* His love for us was not based on our efforts to please him. He had made a covenant with the church and while they were still sinning against him he died for her.
- **Just in case we have forgotten, how do sinners act?** Sinners sin: they get mad, they lie, they go behind God's back and commit sin, they cheat, they get angry, and they hold grudges against God. Sometimes they even question whether they are loved. Sound familiar. **It should because that is the church; this is the Bride of Christ.** But Christ has a stubborn love for us and He will not give up.
- **This is the kind of love that husbands must have for their wives.** A stubborn grace and love that says no matter what it takes, no matter what you do, you are not my enemy but my bride and I will stay with you and love you through it.

B. Husbands should have a sanctifying love for their wives. (Ephesians 5:26-27)

"that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,"²⁷ so 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."

- In vv. 26-27 Paul draws on graphic metaphorical imagery of marriage from Ezekiel 16. In Ezekiel 16, God says He found Israel all alone in a field. She had been left to die in her on blood but God spoke life into the child and offered her protection, cleansing, restoration and prosperity.

Listen to Ezekiel 16:8-14, *"When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine."⁹ Then I **bathed you with water** and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil."¹⁰ I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk."¹¹ And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck."¹² And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head."¹³ Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty."¹⁴ And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God."*

This is metaphorical imagery of how Yahweh genuinely loved His bride Israel. He gave Himself to Israel, He chose them, He gave them the covenants, He gave them His word, He gave them His presence, He made His face to shine on them and they were a reflection for His glory. He was their God and they were His people. He was their spiritual leader. All of this points to sanctifying love and Paul is using this imagery from **Ezekiel 16** to make his point in **Ephesians 5:26-27**.

Application: So what does this sanctifying love mean?

Men it means you are to be the spiritual leaders in your homes. You need to be the resident theologian. For you to be concerned for the spiritual growth of your wife, you must first take seriously your own spiritual growth. Your spiritual growth is not simply being consistent on Sunday mornings. Brothers we need to know the Word of God, learn the Word of God and then share what we are learning with our wives and children.

- **You do this by going deeper than just on Sunday mornings.** Get in a Foundations study and a small group and grow together spiritually. This is a great thing to help your wife grow.
- **Pray together** and if you do not know how to pray then learn how.
- **Read the Bible together** and perhaps memorize Scripture together.
- **When you notice your wife's spiritual growth,** tell her and encourage her.
- **Never criticize her or reprove** her other than on spiritual grounds.
- **Talk about spiritual topics** around the dinner table.
- **One of the best things you could do is have a regular time of family worship.** This is not always an easy thing to do given that we are such active people. Yet it will be one of the most rewarding. I know we devoted a Foundation time to it back on July 23rd so if you have questions about that you might to some of those who presented then.

C. Husbands should have a selfish love for their wives. (Ephesians 5:28-32)

*"In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,³⁰ because we are members of his body.³¹ "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become **one flesh**."³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."*

- **The husband who loves his wife as he loves himself,** which is what I am calling a selfish love (this is a little play on words) the husband who loves this way fulfills the biblical command to become one flesh.

Marriage uses the best kind of math, one plus one equals one. This is the only place where you will find this kind of math because it is the math of marriage (one plus one equals one). Only God can defy the mathematical laws.

This *selfish-love* or *oneness kind of love* results in a complete giving away of one's self to the other person. This is the kind of love the husband is supposed to have for his wife.

Do you know what this kind of love ought to result in? It ought to result in your wife being your best friend. As I said earlier, your wife is not your enemy and neither are you indifferent toward her. She ought to be your best friend. As one pastor said, *"Friendship is a deep oneness that develops as two people, speak the truth in love to each other, journey together to the same horizon . . . the greatest horizon . . . 'the day of Jesus Christ' when we see him face-to-face."*⁶⁵ You see the husband who loves his wife, loves himself.

- This kind of oneness is taken from the Hebrew idea of the mingling of souls. It is an intimate, caring, cherishing love that a husband and a wife are to have for one another.

Conclusion:

Sadly many Christians marriages do not always reflect this kind of submission and love. Wives often fail to submit in the gospel and husbands do not love their wives as Christ loved the church. Husbands and wives are often not friends because isolation reigns in the relationship and then painfully results in the husband and wife becoming enemies. This is what happens when sinners say, "I do."

- **Christians may be God's redeemed people but that does not mean marriage is easy.** The world is broken. We still bear the marks of the Fall. The context of marriage is a key relationship where the gospel is greatly needed. I always tell young couples

⁵ Timothy and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, p. 127.

that I do premarital counseling with that your spouses sin becomes your first hand experience. Do you know what the most satisfying marriages are? They are not those where each spouse does everything perfectly for that will never happen. A satisfying marriage is one where both the husband and the wife each strive to apply the person and work of Jesus Christ to their own heart by being quick to forgive the other and consistently confess sin and seek reconciliation and then move forward in the grace of God. The couple that practices this will experience how the gospel reverses the sinful effects of the Fall in the Garden.

- **Ultimately God's message through Paul in Colossians 3:18-19 and Ephesians 5:22-33 is to teach us how the gospel does just that--reverses the effects of the Fall.** In Romans 5:12ff, we learn that Jesus Christ is the new Adam. As the new Adam, Jesus reverses the effects of the Fall that we see in ancient culture and in modern culture. The effects of the Fall in Genesis 3 are wreaking havoc. If it is not the woman trying to rule over her husband it is the husband lording over his wife or it is the husband doing what Adam did in the garden when the serpent tempted Eve—nothing. Adam just stood by and let her eat the forbidden fruit.
- **Jesus Christ, the new Adam did what the old Adam could not.** He lived a perfect life, He never sinned, He never gave in to the serpent's temptation and He died on the cross as a substitute for sinners. He was the sinless sacrifice for His people earning more than enough righteousness for His people. After Jesus was buried, the tomb could not hold Him. He rose from the dead on the third day.

The righteousness that Jesus earned is credited to His people when in faith they trust Him as their only hope to be saved and they turn from their sins and follow Christ. This is what Jesus did for His people and how He reversed the effects of the Fall in marriage.

 - **Where Adam failed in resisting temptation,** Jesus succeeded in defeating Satan by submitting His body to the wails of the enemy.
 - **Where Adam failed to protect** His bride from the enemy, Jesus succeeded by laying down His own life to save Her.
 - **Where Adam defiled the marriage relationship** with Eve by giving in to sin, Christ Jesus earned righteousness to cleanse his bride, the church, and He heal her.⁶
 - **As Christ laid down His life for the church,** God has called Christian husbands to lay down their lives for their wives. And as Christ submitted to the will of the Father as He sent Him to die on the cross for our sins so wives follow in His steps and submit to their husbands.
- **One of the main purposes of marriage is to picture the relationship between Christ and His church.** So as we prepare to take the Lord's Supper one of the things we need to be reminded of it that taking the Lord's Supper is actually covenant renewal for us as the as the Bride of Christ. We are reminded of what Christ did to lay down His life for His Bride in order to redeem Her. This morning we celebrate our Savior who kept and keeps His covenants with us perfectly and faithfully.

⁶ Billy Cash, *Biblical Theology Project 1: Marriage*, a paper submitted to Dr. Todd Miles at Western Theological Seminary, March 9, 2011, pp. 5-6.