

I Intro. (May 20, 2007)

We come now to Paul's section on family relationships. What he has to say here is a general summary of things, but there is enough detail to keep us busy for a lifetime. All the basic areas are covered, wives to husbands (Col. 3:18), husbands to wives (vs. 19), children to parents (vs. 20) and fathers or parents to children (vs. 21).

II Proper Family Relationships (3:18-21)

A. Wives are to be subject to their husbands (3:18).

1. (vs. 18) "Wives (Αἱ γυναῖκες)" are addressed directly, "the nominative with the definite article being used for a vocative."¹ The term for "wives" is the normal Greek word for, "an adult female person of marriageable age,"² but it is clear from the context here that wives are in view.

Then follows a single command for the wives: "(you pl.) be subject to your husbands." "Be subject (ὑποτάσσεσθε, *second person, plural, present, passive, imperative*)" translates what is, "primarily a military term, to rank under (*hupo*, under, *tassō*, to arrange),"³ or more fully, "to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader."⁴ And "in the Middle or Passive Voice,"⁵ the meaning is, "to subject oneself, to obey, be subject to."⁶ "In non-military use, it was 'a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.'⁷ It is quite a strong term with the sense, "to submit to the orders or directives of someone."⁸ Yet at the same time, we are not to see it in the sense of "subjugation,"⁹ meaning, "To bring under control; conquer... To make subservient; enslave."¹⁰ Wives are not chattel to be bossed around like slaves. The context here is, "Of

submission involving recognition of an ordered structure, w. dat. of the entity to whom... respect is shown... toward a husband."¹¹ Yes it is to her own husband (cf. Eph. 5:22, where ἰδίους [*Idiois*], "one's own, distinct" is added) to whom she is to submit and not to men in general or some other man in particular. This does not obviate men only in leadership in the context of the local church of course with women generally under their authority.

Moderns have long since objected to Paul's teaching in this regard, having tried to dispense with it through various rationalizations. Particularly within evangelicalism, women have said that this headship, subjection milieu came about because of sin. Sin having been utterly forgiven, that structure has been done away, and husband and wife are now equals in authority in marriage. Such is not the case however, for Paul based his teaching on men only in leadership in the church on the structure *in marriage* in the garden before the fall. He said, "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve" (1Tm. 2:12-13). It is safe to assume that if man had authority in marriage before the fall, he also had it after the fall, notwithstanding the introduction of sin or forgiveness of sin.

There is in all of us a potential unhealthy thirst for power, the last of the three major areas of sin listed in 1Jn. 2:16, "the boastful pride of life." There is a natural propensity for wives to look at this verse and immediately respond to it defensively as if the only possible outcome of such an arrangement would be a bad one. This problem is predicted in Gen. 3:16b (cp. 4:7). Believing wives must be prepared to deal with this most imminent of temptations.

Of course the solution for the problem is to believe God's word. God's plan for wives is the one recorded in this verse in Colossians. There is no exception to it in Scripture, that is, there is no marriage where this does not apply. God prepared women for this role in marriage in every conceivable way, physically, mentally, and spiritually. *In marriage*, women are really not

1Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 8th ed. (London and New York: Macmillan and co., 1886), 224.

2Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989), 1:107.

3Vine, W. E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981.

4James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.*, electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996), G5293.

5Vine, W. E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981.

6Vine, W. E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981.

7James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.*, electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996), G5293.

8Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989), 1:467.

9Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Col 3:18.

10*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* copyright © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Electronic version licensed from InfoSoft International, Inc. All rights reserved.

11William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1042.

equipped to lead. It is contrary to God's will and word that they attempt to do so. Such will lead to disaster. It really is that simple.

We acknowledge however that it is not necessarily God's will for every woman to get married. Further, if a woman is considering a particular man for marriage, she should ask herself if she would be glad to submit to *that* man. If not, she should not marry him. A woman should marry only the man to whom she *desires* to submit. Trouble looms for that marriage where a woman marries a man while thinking, "He's fraught with problems, but I'll get him straightened out." She presumes to be in the know and in control before the wedding. In reality, she is the one who has a lot to learn, regardless of his problems, real or imagined. A woman who finds a man to whom she is thus ready to submit will find little difficulty in expressing the appropriate demeanor of respect (Eph. 5:33) toward him.

So Paul's command was the right command, as he said, "as is fitting (ἀνῆκεν 'impers...it is proper'¹²) in the Lord," that is, be subject to your husbands because it is fitting or proper in the Lord. The meaning is not to do it so long as it is fitting in the Lord, but when it no longer is fitting, then the wife is free to suspend submission. Of course, it should go without being said that a believing wife is under no obligation to follow her husband's lead into sin (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29).

We should all know by now that individual worth or personhood is not contingent on being in authority either. After all Jesus is fully God, co-equal with the Father (Col. 2:9), and yet "Christ belongs to God," (1Cor. 3:23b), and "God is the head of Christ" (11:3; cf. 15:28). Clearly the difference between the Father and the Son is one of function not at all essence or kind. So also is it with husband and wife, the difference is not of essence or kind or worth or value, but of function. The only way a marriage can function properly is if husband and wife both function according to their God ordained function. Sadly, husbands drop the ball concerning their role just as often as wives do.

B. Husbands have a dual command to which to respond (3:19).

1. (vs. 19) "Husbands (Οἱ ἄνδρες)," are here directly addressed. Of course, a husband is, "A man joined to a woman in marriage."¹³ In this verse, husbands have a two-fold responsibility.

First positively they are commanded, "love (ἀγαπάτε) your wives." A husband is not to love women in general nor another woman in particular, but his own wife as the parallel passages in Eph. 5:28, 32-33 make clear. This sort of love expresses itself by, "behaving unselfishly (1 Cor. 13). The Greek word translated 'love' is *agapao*, the 'all give' type of love, not *phileo*, the 'give and take' type, nor *erao*, the 'all take' type."¹⁴ Imagine such a husband who gladly and warmly gives sacrificially of himself to see to it that his wife becomes all that God would have her be in this life, namely, conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, so that she becomes like Him in character and conduct. The lexicon likely captures the sense of love well here, "to have a warm regard for and interest in another, *cherish, have affection for*."¹⁵ There is no point in trying to rule out emotion with respect to the Greek word here (ἀγαπάτε, lemma, ἀγαπάω). The word does not depend on emotion, that is why it is the only love expressly commanded in Scripture ("People are never commanded to love one another with φιλέω or φιλία,"¹⁶ but cf. Titus 2:4, which comes very close to a command in the context with the term, "φιλόανδρου [philandrous]".) but it does not exclude it either.

Second, negatively husbands are commanded, "and do not be embittered (πικραίνεσθε *present, passive, imperative*, lemma, πικραίνω) against them." The Greek term translated, "embittered," comes "from a root *pik*—, meaning to cut, to prick, hence, lit., pointed, sharp, keen."¹⁷ In context, in terms of the disposition of the husband, it is that rather subtle, but settled negative attitude that happens to

¹³The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition copyright © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Electronic version licensed from InfoSoft International, Inc. All rights reserved.

¹⁴Tom Constable, Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003). Col 3:19.

¹⁵William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). 5.

¹⁶Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989). 1:293.

¹⁷Vine, W. E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981.

¹²Bauer, Walter, Gingrich, F. Wilbur, and Danker, Frederick W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1979.

(passive) and in a man after an extended period of repeatedly being annoyed or irritated or generally bothered or provoked by things his wife does or fails to do. Once developed, it is, “to have bitter resentment or hatred toward someone else.”¹⁸ That in practical terms finds expression in the husband being, “irritated or cross,”¹⁹ and “ill-tempered and provoking. Many who are polite”²⁰ elsewhere, “are rude and bitter at home because they are not afraid to be so there.”²¹ Such a husband will invariably treat his wife “harshly”²² and not with love. This could easily lead to tyranny in the home with husband behaving, “extremely severe or exacting; stern.”²³ This will in turn be devastating because “wives, like tender and sensitive flowers (cf. 1 Peter 3:7), may wilt under authoritarian dominance but,” could otherwise, “blossom with tender loving care. So in a maturing marriage the husband exercises compassionate care and his wife responds in willing submission to this loving leadership.”²⁴ Thus, “husbands must not allow a bitter attitude to develop toward their wives because of the wife’s lack of submission or for any other reason.”²⁵

“It has been noted that the husband is not told to make his wife obey him.”²⁶ In fact, he *cannot*, and “if she does not, he should take it to the Lord. The submission should be her voluntary act ‘as is fitting in the Lord.’”²⁷

C. Children are to be obedient (3:20).

1. (vs. 20) This is one of the rare places in the NT where children (τὰ τέκνα) are directly addressed by God. Here it is the simple active command, “be obedient (ὑπακούετε) to your parents (γονεῖσιν) in all things.” The Greek word for “obedience” comes from the Greek word, meaning literally, “*hupo*, under, *akouō*, to hear,”²⁸

or to listen or attend from a point of subordination so that one does what one is told. “The Greek word for obey implies a readiness to listen to and carry out parental instructions.”²⁹ Both parents are to know what is best for their children, they desire the best for them, so the children must take guidance from their parents so that they will grow into godly minded adults. “The rule is stated absolutely, because the exceptions are so few that they may be disregarded.”³⁰

“The Greek word for children (*tekna*) means youths in contrast to babes and toddlers.”³¹ The reference is to children, still in the home and not yet adults, who are old enough to understand, appreciate, and comply with the command. The children’s obedience is to be total and comprehensive, “in all things,” that is, “not occasional obedience, but continual.”³² Children are to be “faithful...not accused of dissipation or insubordination,”³³ (Titus 1:6b), but “under control with all dignity” (1Tm. 3:4b). “Nowhere does modern civilization show more weakness than just here. Waves of lawlessness sweep over the world because the child was not taught to obey.”³⁴

As above, the only exception would be in that exceedingly rare incidence, “if the parent required the child to disobey God, the child should obey God rather than man (Acts 4:19; 5:29; Eph. 6:1).”³⁵

The reason for the compliance is, “for this is well-pleasing (εὐάρεστον) to the Lord,” and not because it has been discovered by sociological and psychological studies performed by men. The adjective “well-pleasing” in its verb form, “in the Gr-Rom. world (was) commonly said of things and esp. of pers. noted for their civic-minded generosity and who endeavor to do things that are pleasing.”³⁶ The adjective is often translated “*acceptable*”³⁷ in the NT (et al. Rm. 12:1-2; 14:8; Phil. 4:18). In each of those places, it could just as

18 Louw, Johannes P. and Eugene Albert Nida. Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains. electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. New York: United Bible societies, 1996. c1989. 1:763.
19 Tom Constable. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Col 3:19.
20 Jamieson, Robert, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset, David Brown and David Brown. A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997. Col 3:19.
21 Jamieson, Robert, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset, David Brown and David Brown. A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997. Col 3:19.
22 Joseph Barber Lightfoot, Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon., 8th ed. (London and New York: Macmillan and co., 1886). 225.
23 *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* copyright © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Electronic version licensed from InfoSoft International, Inc. All rights reserved.
24 Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary. The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985. 683.
25 Tom Constable. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Col 3:19.
26 MacDonald, William and Arthur Farstad. Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments. electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997. c1995. Col 3:19.
27 MacDonald, William and Arthur Farstad. Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments. electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997. c1995. Col 3:19.
28 Vine, W. E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981.

29 Tom Constable, Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003). Col 3:20.
30 Joseph Barber Lightfoot, Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon., 8th ed. (London and New York: Macmillan and co., 1886). 225.
31 Tom Constable. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Col 3:20.
32 Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention) 1998, c1933.
33 *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.
34 Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention) 1998, c1933.
35 Tom Constable. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Col 3:20.
36 William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). 403.
37 William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). 403.

easily, and in some cases preferably, be translated, “well-pleasing.” On the other hand, it would easily be possible to translate here, “for this is acceptable to the Lord,” that is, it meets with divine approval and is therefore rewardable. Yes, children ought to be taught to obey because of rewards at the coming judgment seat of Christ (cf. Col. 3:22-24).

D. Fathers responsibility to children (3:21).

1. (vs. 21) “Fathers (Οἱ πατέρες)” are directly addressed. We know that the Greek word can be understood to mean parents in Hb. 11:23, and that can be the sense here as is suggested by BDAG, “male and female together as parents οἱ πατέρες *parents*...(...of parents who are inclined to become λίην δύσζηλοι [very exceedingly jealous, ed.] toward their children).”³⁸ The more common word for parents is γονεύς, and no doubt, “the father (*pateron*) has the primary responsibility for his children as head of the household,”³⁹ but Paul certainly is *not* saying that it is okay for mothers to do this evil. Yet many have!

The command is “do not exasperate (ἐρεθίζετε) your children,” or perhaps, “stop exasperating your children” captures the meaning. “Exasperate” means “to excite, stir up, provoke,”⁴⁰ and is used in a good sense in 2Cor. 9:2, where it is translated, “stir up,” as in motivating other believers to take good action. Here the meaning is, “to cause someone to feel resentment,”⁴¹ which is, “a feeling of indignant displeasure or persistent ill will at something regarded as a wrong, insult, or injury.”⁴² This is typically caused by the imposition of requirements that are beyond a child’s ability to comply. One form these strictures might have taken would be, “the regimen of ‘don’ts’ that loomed so large in the Colossian heresy”⁴³ (Col. 2:20). “Even in children there is a keen sense of injustice and inconsiderateness.”⁴⁴ This being treated so unfairly by, “ceaseless irritation causes children to become”⁴⁵ angry, then

“sullen,”⁴⁶ developing into, “silent resentment,”⁴⁷ then finally the child might well, “lose heart (ἀθυμῶσιν ‘dispirited, α [a] privative, θυμός [*thumos*], spirit or courage’⁴⁸)” becoming, “listless, and discouraged.”⁴⁹ Finally such a child “lack(s) motivation”⁵⁰ to such an extent that he gives up. One can occasionally observe such a child going “about” his “task in a listless, moody, sullen frame of mind.”⁵¹

The negative purpose of not exasperating one’s children is to avoid this devastating outcome. This is a very serious matter.

After the similar negative statement, “fathers, do not provoke your children to anger” Eph. 6:4 adds the positive admonition, “but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

III Conc

Wives, husbands, children, and fathers or parents have been appropriately, but succinctly instructed here. It is now up to each one of us to act accordingly.

38William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 786.

39Tom Constable, Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible, Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003, Col 3:21.

40W.E. Vine and F.F. Bruce, Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words : W.E. Vine ; Old Testament Edited by F.F. Bruce., electronic ed. (Old Tappan NJ: Revell, 1981; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996), 228.

41Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989), 1:760.

42In Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary., electronic ed of the 10th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1993; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996).

43Tom Constable, Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible, Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003, Col 3:21.

44Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians: The Greek Text With Notes and Addenda. Ed. Brooke Foss Westcott, bp. of Durham and John Maurice Schulhof, [from old catalog. London; New York: Macmillan and co., limited; The Macmillan company, 1909, 88.

45Tom Constable, Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible, Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003, Col 3:21.

46Tom Constable, Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible, Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003, Col 3:21.

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48Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention) 1998, c1933.

49Tom Constable, Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible, Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003, Col 3:21.

50Louw, Johannes P. and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989, 1:319.

51Lightfoot, Joseph Barber, Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon. 8th ed. London and New York: Macmillan and co., 1886, 225.