

“CHRISTIAN LIVING IN THE HOME”
COLOSSIANS 3:18-19—the wife and the husband; Part 1
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INTRODUCTION

A man was once asked whether a certain person was a Christian. He answered, “I do not know; I have never lived with him.” The reality of our Christian faith has its biggest test and its most important opportunity for display at home.

Many have been offended by the family principles taught by Paul here and elsewhere since they find the passages to promote a highly “patriarchal” form of family with dominance by the man, and have argued that Paul has merely copied the customary pattern for household codes popular in the world of his day in order not to offend cultural norms and thus to find wider acceptance for Christian teachings. That is not true for several reasons:

- a. The passages are filled with teachings of distinctive Christian principles.
- b. These authors would not compromise Biblical truth in their desire to commend Christianity.
- c. Moderns must look at the more likely possibility that our own modern perspective has skewed our acceptance of the teachings in these passages.
- d. Therefore, while reflecting the culture of the time, this passage must be ‘heard’ as an authentic New Testament voice, integrated with, and not simply overridden by, the very important insistence on ‘equality’ in Christ.

Moreover, Hendriksen points out the following:

- 1) Only Christianity **supplied the power** to fulfill the demands in the grace of God. “All other moral philosophies, the very best of them, are trains lacking engines!” (p. 167)
- 2) Christianity supplies **a much higher purpose** than merely maintaining social order—the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31; see esp. Col. 3:17 immediately preceding this household code, and upon which it is built).
- 3) **Christ himself gives the only true pattern:** He is the bridegroom for His bride (Eph. 5:25, 32); the model obedient child of his earthly parents (Lk. 2:51), faithful adult son (Jn. 19:25-27), and obedient Son to His heavenly Father (Phil. 2:8); and He gave a great lesson for fathers in Lk. 15:20-24.

The new creation in Christ did not dissolve the importance of the physical family. The code here in Colossians and elsewhere gives guidance for the way Christians are to bring all of life under the lordship of Christ. These relationships must be lived under Christ’s lordship. Such household codes as this one show the importance of the ordinary family life, and show that in order to manifest “the reality of one’s Christian profession” one must live under Christ’s lordship.

YOUR HOME MUST REFLECT THE NEW CREATION AND THE “NEW MAN” YOU ARE IN CHRIST.

I. WIVES: SUBMIT YOURSELVES TO YOUR HUSBANDS.

All four commands are in the present continuous tense—be doing this as a practice—or don’t be doing this.

A. The meaning of “submission”—“to order under”; common military term

1. The applications are broad—to God, Christ, government leaders, masters/bosses, church leaders, children to parents, wives to husbands.
2. Many wrongly think that Eph. 5:21 is an exception to this meaning, and that it means “show deference to,” or “respect for” like Phil. 2:3-4.
3. Then they try to transfer that idea to the passages of the wife’s submission to her husband.
4. Cf. the rendering of *The Message*: “Understand and support your husbands.” Bruce even calls the wife’s duty here “deference to her husband” and considers the responsibility of the wife to be simply a particular example “of the general duty of submissiveness which [Eph. 5:21] all Christians are encouraged to show to one another” (p. 161).

Sorry folks, but this interpretation is just wrong! Even though many evangelical leaders have held it. God Himself established the creation order of putting the wife under the authority of the husband.

5. Paul's deliberate use of the different term for "submission" of the wife rather than "obedience" seems to point out a less authoritarian form of relationship in a marriage.
- "Submission" generally depicts a voluntary placing of oneself under the authority of another.
 - Such submission gives no right for the husband to be a despot.
 - Submission does not indicate *inferiority*, cf. Christ's submission to His Father—not *inferior*.
 - The traditional wedding vows with the promise of the wife to "**obey**" her husband is in accord with the spirit of Paul's words here and elsewhere; I respectfully submit that this vow ought to remain in its place—especially in a culture that restricts man's authority and leadership and unduly exalts the place of women.
 - Christianity has elevated the status of the wife/woman in sharp contrast with the attitudes and practices of the Greeks, Romans, and even the Jews.
 - Moreover, it is just the person who has learned properly to submit to his authorities who is able to properly govern those over whom he is put in authority.
 - She must never violate God's laws/commands in order to fulfill the demand of her husband's authority (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). **The one limitation for submission.**
 - However, even when disobedience is necessary the wife must do so with a submissive spirit.
 - The husband's authority and leadership must be "conditioned significantly" by God's demand that he **love** his wife.

B. The Motive for submission—"as is fitting"

- The behavior has been and continues to be 'fitting.'
- Now Paul does not make these words a limitation of the requirement just given to the wife as though he meant "submit in such a way as is fitting."
- These last words of v. 18 explain why submission is necessary.

C. The sphere of submission—"in the Lord"

- In the mystic union with and mutual fellowship with the Lord formed when the Christian wives trusted Christ and their responsibility commenced at that point.
- Just as He himself submitted to and obeyed His Father and even His earthly parents (see Mt. 11:29; 22:21; Lk. 2:51; Jn. 15:10).
- Notice the repeated emphasis of Christ's Lordship in this section.
- Of course wives do have rights and privileges, but the Lord has established leadership principles that are "essential to a well-ordered home" where the husband should be a wise "head" under the Headship of Christ.

II. HUSBANDS: BE A GOOD LEADER IN YOUR MARRIAGE.

The world in which Paul lived and wrote was "a man's world, and even among the Jews the wife was often little more than chattel" (V. 218). Requiring husbands to keep their homes under his control and well-ordered was a common feature of secular family codes; requiring husbands to love their wives was not—in fact, Moo states that "no other code we have discovered from the ancient world requires husbands to love their wives" (302). Quite often the love spoken of by the ancients was sexual love. Rarely do they speak of the husband's love for his wife.

A. Love your wives.

1. The meaning of love—Agape kind of love as shown by the Father—"God so loved" and the Son. The self-sacrificial love of the believer who imitates his Savior. Despite his leadership authority, the believing husband is to regard his wife as "a joint-heir of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7) and should never be harsh but always act in an understanding way.
2. See the specific mention of Christ's love for the Church as the pattern for the husband in Eph. 5:25. Such agape love is deliberate—not merely a feeling; it concerns itself with the well-being of its

object. One with this kind of love manifests “self-devotion, not self-satisfaction” (V. 218). In the only other use of this verb in Colossians (3:12) Paul speaks of God’s love for believers; then, in 3:14 Paul commands believers to “*put on love.*”

3. The world’s view of love—or Hollywood love—is that it “simply happens. People ‘fall’ in love, ‘helplessly and hopelessly.’ Love is viewed as a kind of beneficent virus to which man exposes himself. If he catches it, he is blessed; if he does not, he waits and hopes. He has little or no control in the matter” (Wisdom, p. 44). This worldly picture of love is a gross distortion of what Paul describes here.

Paul commands love; the kind of love depicted here involves the will and the mind as well as the feelings.

- a) The husband is to love his wife whether or not she reciprocates his love—just as Christ died for us when we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8).
- b) The husband is to love his wife even if she does not deserve his love and has despicable qualities.
- c) Love is produced by **giving** (see I Jn. 3:16; cf. I Jn. 4:9-11).
- d) Husbands’ love is to imitate the giving, self-sacrificial love of Christ for the Church (Eph. 5:25).
- e) “We love Him because He first loved us” (I Jn. 4:19). Generally such love by a husband for a wife will lead to reciprocal love from her.
- f) Regardless, the absence of love in a home **is not an excuse for dissolution—divorce!**

Thomas says concerning the husband’s love, “Love is not a mere feeling but also a **fact**, not only emotion but **devotion**, not just an attitude but **action**, not only sentiment but **sacrifice**” (p. 122).

B. Do not be bitter against them.—

1. The verb has the idea of “being sharp, harsh, and bitter.” It refers to friction caused by impatience and thoughtless nagging.
2. Moo points out that in other ancient Greek writings derivative words are used with reference to rulers that are “domineering and harsh.
3. Paul is probably reflecting this tradition, urging husbands not to act with a heart of bitterness toward their wives. Such teaching properly balances the husband’s right of authority over his wife. The wife in that culture had little chance of redress at law if her husband mistreated her.
4. However, the practice of the Christian virtues of vv. 12-13 would make it impossible for the Christian husband to be abusive of anyone, let alone his wife: forbearance, forgiveness, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. The lack of love toward the wife will result in “that hard treatment in look and word, that unkind and churlish temper which defective attachment so often leads to.” If the husband’s love is missing, he will not succeed in gaining the wife’s submission—even with “perpetual irritation and fault-finding”

CONCLUSION

Who is sufficient for these things—not me, nor you, **in our flesh.**

But we are new creatures in Christ. We have put off the old man and have put off the new.

We are under the grace of God; we have the power of the indwelling Spirit.

We have no excuse!

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