

After just a few years of marriage filled with disagreements and strife, a young couple decided the only way to save their marriage was to try counseling. Things had slipped from bad to worse as the months passed, turning their marriage into a marathon of misery. They had been at each other's throats for so long that counseling seemed like their only hope. He was incredibly insensitive and dull, while she was hyperactive and dominant.

When they arrived at the office, the counselor jumped right in and opened the floor for discussion. "Well," he began, "what seems to be the problem?" Immediately, the husband slumped in his chair and assumed a defeated posture. He stared down at the carpet, and only managed to shrug his shoulders. He had nothing to say. In contrast, his wife didn't hold back a bit – talking ninety miles an hour – describing all the wrongs within their marriage, and every wrong could be traced back to her husband.

After fifteen minutes of listening to the non-stop wife, the counselor stood up without saying a word, walked over to her, and while she was still in mid-sentence, picked her up by her shoulders, gave her a big hug, kissed her passionately, then sat her back down. She sat there in stunned silence.

The counselor looked over at her husband, who was staring in disbelief. He then said to the husband, "Listen to me. Your wife needs that at least twice a week – every week!" The husband scratched his head and then replied. "Well, I guess I could bring her here on Tuesdays and Thursdays."

I'm not sure where I would begin with this couple, but I think the Apostle Paul might have a good idea. For the last few weeks, Paul has been telling the Colossian believers, and us as well, that because we died with Christ and are made alive in Him, we are to *put off* the old sinful, self-centered person that we used to be, and we are to *put on* the virtues which are consistent with who we are in Jesus Christ – virtues which correspond to our new life and our new character – virtues which are revealed in how we treat each another.

Now, continuing with Paul's train of thought, this morning he is going to take us to where the rubber meets the road – we are going into the home. It's been said "*home is where the heart is*" and that may be true, but I'm going to take it a little further by saying, "*How we live at home reveals the true reality of our hearts.*"

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Colossians 3** and we will pick up where we left off beginning with **verse 18**. Paul says,

18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.

Okay, before we dive into these verses, before I cut my own throat, I want to give you some context. In the days of the early church, there were three predominate cultures in society. There was the Jewish culture, the Greek culture, and the Roman culture, and in each of these cultures – all extremely male-dominated, there was a very low opinion of women – of wives.

For example, in the Jewish culture, I think this little prayer made each morning by many Jewish men kind of sums it all up. “*God, I thank you that I am not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.*” A woman had the status of a second-class citizen – wives were treated a little better than servants – and according to their man-made laws, a woman was a possession, owned by her husband in the same way he owned his sheep and goats. As a woman, as a wife, she had little to no rights.

In the Greek culture, a wife was considered the tool of a man, and the sign of a good wife was that she must *see* as little, *hear* as little, and *ask* as little as possible. A wife was to remain indoors, she had no independence, she no mind of her own, and her role was simply to bear children and to keep house. That’s it.

In the Roman culture, the man had absolute control over his wife and children. When a woman was under the rule of her father – the father had all power over her – to include the power of life and death, and when she married, that same power was transferred from the father to the husband.

So, as you can see, in any culture of that day, a woman was in a very difficult spot, but then Jesus comes along and He challenges these cultural norms. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus was respectful and compassionate towards women. He showed equality by teaching women alongside the men when the other teachers of His days excluded women, and in the Christian movement which followed after Him, the value of a woman was greatly elevated. Women were to be treated with dignity as children of God and co-heirs with Christ, the family became a fixture within this new Christian culture, and the marriage relationship became a pattern for the church.

Now having said all of that, put yourself in the shoes of a Christian woman in those days. How conflicting and confusing it must have been to be a wife living in a society whose opinion regarding women was vastly different from what Jesus had taught and modeled. And on top of that, think about this: It was not uncommon

for the wife to come to Christ before her husband, and as you might imagine, this became a significant issue for these wives because a husband expected his wife to follow his customs and his religious practices.

This is what these Christian wives faced – they were confused – they needed some godly guidance, and the guidance that Paul gives here is the same guidance he gave to the Ephesians, it’s the same guidance that the Apostle Peter gave in his letter, and it’s the same guidance intended for us – even today.

In **verse 18**, Paul says **wives** are to be **subject** to their **husbands**. Now before we get into the wording, I want to make a general observation.

As you can see, what is said here specifically pertains to the relationship between a wife and her husband, and does not apply to men and women in general. In other words, a woman can run a company and can men work for her. In my previous careers, some of my best supervisors were women, and I was honored to work for them. Also, young ladies, if you are dating someone, and the guy says this applies to you – he is absolutely wrong. This is specific to wives and husbands.

Okay, let’s tackle that one word, which is probably the most hated word among women maybe because it’s the most distorted word among men. The word is “*subject*” or “*submit*” depending on your translation – and husbands, please notice that Paul does not use the word “*obey*” here. Paul could have – in fact, he will do so when he gets to the children who are told to *obey* their parents, and to the slaves who are told to *obey* their masters, but here he uses an entirely different Greek word – it’s “*hupotássō*” which means *to place under*, or *to rank under* like in military rank, or *to arrange in an orderly fashion*.

If you recall back in Chapter 1, Paul told us that Jesus is the Creator of all things. He is the Sustainer of all things, and He holds all things together in their place. Jesus gives order to the universe – that’s how it functions, that’s how He has designed it – and His grand design for the universe funnels all the way down to the family – even your family.

So, when Paul uses the word “*hupotássō*” – when he says, “**Wives be subject to your husbands**” – this has to do with order and function within a family. In the eyes of God, a man and a woman are considered equal in Christ – equal, but be that may, out of respect and honor, the wife is to *willingly* place herself under the leadership of her husband – her imperfect husband.

This is God's design – for the sake of order and function within a family – wives are to place themselves under the leadership of their husbands, and it's important to point out that nowhere does this suggest that wives are inferior to their husbands. Paul does not say that the husband hears the Lord better than his wife. He does not claim the husband is closer to the Lord than his wife. Paul does not imply that wives are lacking in character, or in wisdom, or in talents. Instead, wives have simply been given a role in the family that places them under the leadership of their husband so that the two of them work together as one. As an act of respect and honor between equals, wives are to submit to their husbands as long as that submission does not violate God's Word.

And husbands, nowhere in the Bible are you told to bully and dominate your wives into submission. That's not your role. Your wife is not your *doormat*, and sadly, many husbands – many Christian husbands think they can *walk all over their wives* as if it is their God-given right – and it's not. The wife's submission to her husband is to be voluntary – it's on her to let you lead her – it's on her to follow your lead, and here's why she should.

Look at the last part of **verse 18** where Paul says, “**as is fitting in the Lord.**” That word “**fitting**” speaks to actions that are due to someone – and in this verse, it's actions that are due to the Lord, and when compared to other passages, I think what Paul is saying is this: A wife's submission to her husband, in reality, is an act of worship and service that is rightfully due to the Lord. In other words, she is not only submitting to her husband, she is submitting to the Lord Himself. Now, Paul is not done. Look at **verse 19**.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.

On its own, at first glance, this verse sounds pretty easy. Husbands, you just got to **love your wives**, but let's connect this passage to some other words by Paul he gave to the Ephesian believers. In **Ephesians 5:25**, Paul says this,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

Now, that changes things a bit. Husbands, you are to love your wives just like Jesus loved the church. Think about that for a moment. **How did Jesus love the church?** We know that Jesus laid down His life, so that means a husband is to love his wife sacrificially. Jesus suffered and carried a cross to a hill called “*Golgotha*” and there He was crucified so that we might have life – so husband, if need be, you

are to love by taking the hardest and the worst road for yourself so that your wife receives the greatest benefit. **Isn't that what Jesus did?** Husband, you get to sacrifice for the sake of your wife. You lead for her sake. You get to love in a way that helps her. You know what brings her joy. You know what brings her peace. You know she is different – but you love her and lead her sacrificially. You do what is best for her just as Jesus did what was best for you, and then Paul adds – don't let your sacrifice for her produce anger and resentment in you.

Liz Curtis Higgs was one of the best-known disc jockeys in America, and she lived quite a wild lifestyle, in fact, one day Howard Stern who was the morning show host, told Liz, who covered the evening show, that she needed to clean up her act. That's saying something coming from Howard Stern.

Now because Liz had been burned by so many men, and her heart had been broken...she became a militant feminist. But she had a Christian friend who kept inviting her to church. So, one day after a long, long time, she said, "Okay, I will go to church one time and one time only."

*So, she went to church this one time with her friend, and that week, the pastor just happened to be teaching on the Bible verse that says, "Wives submit yourselves to your husbands." Not exactly a good Bible verse for a militant feminist. Well, she got a little uptight, a little ticked, a little angry, but she continued to listen, and she heard the next part "Husbands, love your wives." The pastor explained this involved the sacrifice of the husband for his wife. The husband was to give himself for his wife just as Jesus sacrificed Himself for the church and died for her." **Who is asked to give their life up? The wife?** No, the husband!*

When Liz heard that part, she leaned over to her friend and said with a little cynicism, "I'd gladly give myself to any man if I knew he would die for me." And her friend leaned over and said, "Liz, there is man who loved you enough to die for you. His name is Jesus Christ. That's how much He loves you." And it was not long after, that Liz dropped her guard, surrendered her life to God in love, and became a believer. Today she is a well-known Christian author and speaker.

You see, the measure of a husband's love for his wife is seen in his acts of sacrifice and concern for her happiness and her welfare and her benefit, and a husband who loves his wife in this way, will likely have a wife who has very little trouble in letting her husband take the lead.

Okay, let's pick on the kids. Beginning with **verse 20**, Paul says,

²⁰ Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

In **verse 20**, Paul is speaking to the kids directly – assuming they are old enough to understand what he’s saying and they’re still living at home. He says to them, you are to be **obedient** to your parents in **all things**. Now, this does not recognize issues such as child abuse, immorality, or something contrary to God’s Word, so wisdom is needed there and kids you might need help, but as a general rule, kids obey your parents – your imperfect parents for this is **well-pleasing to the Lord**.

Paul continues and tells fathers – and this includes mothers too, not to **exasperate** their kids. **So, what does that mean?** In a nutshell, parents are told not to make it so difficult for your kids to obey you. Parents can become so critical and so demanding, that kids just can’t live up to their unreasonable expectations and unfortunately it can produce discouragement and resentment and rebellion. Instead, parents must relate to their kids in the way the Lord relates to them. So, parents, teach your kids, pray with them, listen to them, let them experience your approval and grace, correct them – when necessary, make time for them, and show them God’s design for the family beginning with your marriage. Parents, you are to model in your marriage what love and honor and respect and sacrifice really looks like in a relationship – a relationship that is pleasing to the Lord.

Next Paul moves to slaves and masters, and beginning with **verse 22** he says,

²² Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. ²⁵ For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. Now, I am going to continue on to verse 1 of the next chapter which states, Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

Okay, I need to give you some context here. In those days, slavery was an integral part of society, it was an everyday reality, it impacted all walks of life, and it included all types of people. Historians tell us that in the Roman Empire, there were about 60 million slaves – people who had absolutely no rights – people who were considered to be nothing but “*things*” – things which could talk. Now, in the

context here, it seems the slaves that Paul is referring to are those who held positions in the home as domestic servants.

These slaves attended church, and like the women, they too were trying to sort out their personal roles and responsibilities inside and outside the church. Some may have thought that their new spiritual freedom in Christ had somehow, somehow guaranteed their personal freedom as slaves, whereby they could ignore their obligations to their masters. In other cases, it was quite possible that both the master and the slave attended the same church, and to twist that a bit, a slave could be a leader in a church and his master a member of it. This was a new dynamic involving these roles inside and outside the church, and there was the potential for a lot of confusion and even some abuse.

So, Paul in his guidance explains to the slaves that their status outside the church did not change. If they were slaves before they came to Christ, they were still slaves who still had an obligation to work wholeheartedly for their masters as if they were working for the Lord. And as for masters, they were reminded that they too have a Master – a Master in heaven and He sees everything – there is nothing hidden from Him.

Now, how are we to relate to this? Most commentators draw a comparison of the slave and the master relationship to that of an employee and their employer, and I can see why they would do that – there are some similarities in that relationship, but there are some major differences as well. Keep in mind that masters had total legal control and authority over the lives of their slaves – they were considered property – so unlike us, slaves couldn't give a two-week notice to seek another job somewhere else. There were no labor and industry employment standards. They had no HR department. There was no grievance process. They couldn't go anywhere until the master determined their obligation was satisfied, for they were slaves – not employees.

So, for me, the context given to us by Paul about slaves and masters is not easily relatable in our day and time, however, there are some principles that apply. For an *employee*, the principle is clear. We are to do as we are instructed to do – giving it our all, even when the boss is not watching. Hands down, a Christian worker ought to be the best worker on the job because ultimately, they're working for the Lord. For *employers*, Paul says you are accountable to be **just** – *just* in your expectations and *just* in your corrective action, and not only that, you are to be **fair** – *fair* in your decisions, *fair* in your evaluations, *fair* in your assignments, and *fair* in your wages and benefits.

I know we covered a lot this morning related to God's design for the home, but I want to take you back to what I said in the beginning – *“How we live at home reveals the true reality of our hearts.”* I have heard Christian men say *“Well I am the king of my castle”* but that's just stupid when you think about it. Christ is the only King, and He is to be the King in your marriage, the King in your family, the King in your relationships, and the King in your work, so the question I leave you with this morning is this: **Does the King have your heart?** – for the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart.

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