

Colossians 3:18 “Since You Have Been Raised with Christ... Submit to Your Husband ”
Sept 11, 2022

Proverbs 31:1-31

Psalm 113

I’m tempted to ask for a show of hands of women who are frustrated by the Proverbs 31 woman!
She seems so perfect – so unattainable – so unrealistic!

We had a discussion yesterday at our session meeting about Gregory the Great’s
description of the elder!

Very much the same thing.

What do we do with this?

We could go the route of saying, “this is impossible – I can’t be that!”

But scripture reminds us that God’s standard is not attainable in this life!

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”!

But the standard of truth – of justice – of beauty –
remains!

Proverbs 31 shows us Lady Wisdom.

Proverbs 1-9 had introduced us to Lady Wisdom –
as the Father called his Son to “get wisdom” –
to marry Wisdom – to spend his life with Wisdom!

Proverbs 31 shows us what Lady Wisdom looks like in her earthly garb – you might say.

Proverbs 31 shows us a woman who fears the LORD.

She is strong – confident – wise – caring.

It’s worth noting that when Paul describes the things that should characterize a widow
in 1 Timothy 5,
he draws on these same themes.

Notice that Paul says that this is what she should have done *before* she became a widow!
Young ladies – take note!

This is what you should start doing now!

“having a reputation for good works:
if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality,
has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted,
and has devoted herself to every good work.” (1 Tim 5:10)

Truly as the husband of Proverbs 31 says,

“Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.”

Our Psalm of response sings of such a woman!

Sing Psalm 113 (PHSS)

Read Colossians 3:1-19

It used to be that when I preached my “marriage sermon” from Colossians 3,
that I would invariably get comments afterward saying,
“but what does it mean for a wife to submit to her husband?”

So, when last week, I got several questions along the same lines...
I realized that I needed to bite the bullet and just do it.

For the most part, today sermon is going to be the same as last week.
Because most of what Paul is doing in Colossians 3
remains exactly the same – whether you are husband or wife,
parent or child,
master or slave.

There will be some distinctive parts here and there –
because there is a difference between husband and wife.

But the heart of Christian ethics is the same:

“Since you’ve been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above,
where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
Set your minds on things above – not things that are on earth.
For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
When Christ, who is your life appears,
you also will appear with him in glory.” (3:1-4)

Paul’s letter to the Colossians can be summed up in four questions:

Who is Jesus Christ?
What has he done?
Who are you *in Christ*?
And what does that mean for your life?

We’ve been looking at the five imperatives in verses 12-17 –

Verse 12 – “Put on...” the qualities of Christ (verses 12-14)
Verse 15 – “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (v15a)
Verse 15b – “Be thankful” (v15b)
Verse 16 – “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (v16)
Verse 17 – “and do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v17)

What Paul does at the end of chapter 3
is apply these five imperatives to our everyday relationships
as husbands and wives,
parents and children,
masters and slaves.

The commands – the imperatives – of the Christian life
are rooted in the indicative – the statement of who you are in Christ.

1. Who You *Are* in Christ (v1-11)

We are to become more and more of what we already are *in Christ*.

Paul thinks of the human person in terms of three concentric circles:
the inner man – what he sometimes calls the heart, the mind, the self;
the flesh – our drives and desires and habits;
and the outer surface of our lives – thoughts words and deeds.

When Paul says in verse 3 – that you *have died* –
he’s referring to that inner man –
at the core of who you are – you have died with Christ
and you are been made alive in him – who is your life.

So Paul will say in verse 9,
“you have put off the old self with its practices
and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge
after the image of its creator.”

That language of old self and new self is very much Paul’s *inner man* language.
But then the “being renewed” is connected with Paul’s command to
“put to death what is earthly in you” (v5).
Yes, the old man is dead –
but as long as we are in this body,
we are still putting to death daily the deeds of the flesh –
those things in us that are still hostile to who we are in Christ!

And so begin to put on new habits and practices –
new patterns and ways of knowing and doing –
because we have been made alive with Christ!

2. Therefore *Be* Who You Are in Christ (v12-17)

So what does this mean for wives?

Your life is now,
even NOW,
hidden with Christ in God.

That is the reality for every believer in Jesus Christ.
You are no longer what you once were.

You are NO LONGER the old,
selfish,
arrogant,
lying,
greedy,
angry,
lustful,
inconsiderate,
impatient,
unkind sinner that you used to be.

SHE DIED, and your life is now hidden with Christ.

THEREFORE, Paul says in verse 5,
put to death whatever belongs to that old self
and in verse 8
rid yourself of all such things as these!

That's not you any more, so don't live like it is!

Every time you sin
you are denying who you are
Every time you let sin master you,
you are denying the Master who bought you.

If you are in Christ, then you have put on the new self.

Paul says “wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.” (v18)

The word translated “fitting” has to do with that which proper –
that which is due.

It is your duty in the Lord.

I know.

When “submission” is paired with “duty” – that makes some folks nervous.

We live in a day when “no one tells me what to do”!

And so let me be clear that if a husband abuses his authority,
he should be rebuked by the elders.

(And if his abuse rises to the level of doing serious harm,
he should be arrested by the magistrate!)

You might ask – what if the wife is abusing her husband?!

This has become a real issue.

In many cultures it is not.

Why not?

Because in many cultures a wife has no authority –

and without authority it is impossible to abuse authority!
I've had friends in Russia and Eastern Europe
who have lived in cultures where marriage equality has reached the point
where wives abuse husbands at least as regularly as husbands abuse wives.

One in a position of weakness cannot oppress.
They can still *sin*! (Don't get me wrong – they still sin quite regularly!)
But only one in a position of authority can oppress.

That's why Paul admonishes husbands – “do not be harsh with them”!

People sometimes ask me questions about how far should a wife go in submitting!
Can my husband tell me what to wear?
Can he tell me to be quiet?
Can he micromanage my day?

Can he?
Technically – he could – *but* it would be the very *harshness* that Paul forbids!

So if he does that – do I need to submit?

It might seem as though Paul leaves this open-ended –
until we go back through the first part of chapter 3!

What was the first imperative of the Christian life? (v12-14)
“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,
compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,
bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another,
forgiving each other;
as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive –
and above all, love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

What do you do, O wife, when your husband is acting unreasonably?
You have died – and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.
So put on a compassionate heart – kindness – humility – meekness – and patience.

Your husband is not loving you the way he is supposed to!
Bear with him!

I remember a time when my wife humbled herself in this way.
It nearly broke my heart.
I had been harsh – and she didn't respond with anger,
she didn't respond with tears;
she just humbled herself to follow Jesus –

and set herself to do what Christ called her to do.

I was devastated!

If she had responded the way she used to –
I would have felt justified!
(Oh, you know how this works –
when anger begets anger – you get to feeling
“ah, you’re as bad as me!”)

But instead, she followed Christ when I refused to –
and that brought me to repentance faster than I had ever repented!

It doesn’t always work that way!

But your submission is to win your husband –
as Peter says in 1 Peter 3 –
when he suggests that a wife’s submission could even be the instrument
of converting an unbelieving husband!
(I had a chance to baptize a husband who had a wife like that
in my first pastorate!).

So what do you do when it doesn’t work?

Well – that’s where Paul’s discussion of complaints and forgiveness comes in.

Paul assumes that you have a problem with someone else
that you will go to them and say so!
That’s called bringing a complaint.
If your husband treated you harshly –
if he is micromanaging you –
if he is being overbearing –
then you should go to him and present your complaint.

If he acknowledges his fault,
and seeks to repair it –
then you should forgive him!

If he refuses to acknowledge his fault,
and you are still convinced that it’s a problem –
then you need to follow Matthew 18,
and bring one or two witnesses to help show him his fault!

And if he refuses to hear them, then you need to come to the elders.

All of that is still consistent with “wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord.”
How do I know that?

Because verse 18 is simply one application of the rest of chapter 3!
And chapter 3, verse 13, talks about complaints – and forgiveness –
so we should include the rest of what Scripture teaches
about complaints and forgiveness here!

Maybe you've tried all that before.
Maybe it didn't work.
Maybe you've reached a place where you are afraid for yourself or your children.
Do I have to go through all that *again*?

No.

If you are afraid for yourself or your children,
then the proper response is to run.
There was a woman who had tried to work through issues in two previous churches –
when she came to us, she came running!

We did *not* tell her that she needed to start over!
A family from the church took her in and protected her.
He was *not* repentant.
He did *not* seek to repair his faults.

When that happens, when a husband doubles down on bitterness and refuses to love,
then he should be excommunicated – cut off from Christ –
and declared to be an unbeliever.

(The same is true, on the other hand, when a wife refuses to submit to a loving husband).

Paul does not say to put on humility, meekness, and patience – when you feel like it.
He does not say to forgive if the other person deserves it –
No, it is “as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive!”

Submission is hard.
I know it sounds funny to hear me say it.
I'm a husband.
I'm a father.
I'm a pastor.
I'm a teacher.
I'm in a dozen positions of authority.

But I took a vow of submission.

When I stood before the Great Lakes Presbytery,
they asked me, “Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?”

Submission is hard.

It means that when the session makes a decision,
you will generally never hear from me when I disagreed with it!
Because I promised subjection to my brethren in the Lord.

When there is an issue before the Presbytery or the General Assembly,
I will speak openly for what I believe to be the best course of action,
but once the decision is made,
I do my best to submit to my brothers in the Lord,
and recognize that this is now *our* decision.

And just as with the wife – so also with a pastor –
there is a proper avenue for complaint!

Part of the problem is that we don't take submission seriously in American culture.
We'll look at this in a couple weeks when we get to Paul's instruction for the workplace!
The refrain in American culture is "nobody tells me what to do!"

At the heart of submission is the mind of Christ.

As Paul says in Philippians 2:5-8

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant,
being born in the likeness of men.
And being found in human form, he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Submission is not something unique to women.
Submission is something that must characterize *all Christians*.

If you are not a submissive person, then you need Jesus!
Because if you believe in Jesus – if you have been united to Christ by faith –
then Christ *is* your life –
that same Christ who humbled himself for you.

So let the *peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body*.
NOT – let your husband rule your heart.
Your husband does not rule you.

You owe submission – yes!
But you do not owe submission because of how great your husband is!
You owe submission to your husband,

because the *peace of Christ* rules in your hearts.

You owe submission to Christ – and therefore you submit to your husband
out of reverence for Christ!

The husband is not called to make his wife submit.

No!

The husband is called to *love his wife*.

I cannot find any way of trying make my wife submit
that does not wind up becoming the very harshness that Paul forbids!

But in the same way,
the wife is not called to make her husband love her.

Nagging does not work!

Oh, it might convince him to get off the couch and take out the trash –
just to get you to shut up!

But that's not love.

Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk will never result in love.

How do you get to love?

And – as verses 15-17 remind us –
the root of submission is found in thankfulness.

Be thankful.

Are you characterized by gratitude?

First – of course – gratitude to God!

Be thankful that he has delivered you from the domain of darkness!

If you see God for who he is –

and if you see your own sin clearly for what it is –
then you will marvel at the kindness and mercy of God
in Jesus Christ!

As long as you think that you are pretty okay –
then you will be an ungrateful person.

As long as you think that you deserve better –
then you will *not* be thankful!

But Paul says – “be thankful!”

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

How does the Word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom?
We need to *know* the Word – not just facts about the Word –
but the Word should *dwell* in us.

Do you want your life to transformed by the gospel?
then allow the gospel to reshape you!

What word dwells in you?
Whose word dwells in you?

It's not a matter of going through the motions.
It's about rooting your whole life in the Word of God.
Most people find that starting their day in the Word and prayer
is very helpful for orienting your daily life towards the Lord.

But Paul is not saying, "let the Word of Christ have a few minutes of your time"
He is saying, "let the Word of Christ LIVE in you!"
God's Word should permeate every aspect of your life.

The result of Christ's Word dwelling richly in us
should be that we teach and admonish one another in song!

True Christian piety is rooted in the Word of God,
therefore we should sing God's Word to each other.
We can do this either through singing the Psalms or other biblical passages,
or through singing paraphrases and summaries of biblical teaching.

And Paul's not talking about singing at church.
He's talking about singing in daily life!

Why are we so feeble in our Christian walk?
Well, we're not singing much to each other – are we?
If the Word of Christ dwells in us richly –
then we would overflow in song!

Paul is not expecting everyone to be an amazing singer!
But he is expecting that your knowledge of the scriptures would overflow into your life!

We teach and admonish each other, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord.
You don't have to have a great voice.
That's okay.
God doesn't care how it sounds,
but he delights to hear us sing to one another!

And as we do, the Word of Christ will continually reshape us into his image.

Since Christ is all and is in all, DO all in his name, with a thankful heart! (v17)

17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Christ is the center.

Everything in your life should revolve around him.

When you speak, it is in his name!

When you act, it is for his glory.

But PLEASE do not get legalistic about this!

This is not done out of guilt,

or out of some sense that YOU can please God in your own efforts!

NO!

You do all things out of gratitude for what Christ has done for you!

Because YOU ARE IN CHRIST

Because You Have Died with HIM,

and been raised to the right hand of the Father in HIM,

therefore all your life is to be centered in him.

So,

because this is who you are in Christ,

take off your dirty clothes,

take off your filthy, sinful rags,

and put on Christ.

And do this in the simple, every day, trivial matters of life.

In a Christian marriage, the husband loves his wife so thoroughly –

with such meekness and patience –

that her submission is a joy.

In a Christian marriage, the wife submits to her husband so completely –

with such compassion and kindness –

that his love is also a joy.

Conclusion:

If someone asked me, "How does the church submit to Christ?"

Could I point to you?

Could I say, "look at how she submits to her husband"?

But husbands, don't start elbowing your wives yet!

If someone asked me, "How much does Christ love the church?"

Could I point to you?

Could I say, "look at how he loves his wife"?

I know – we all fall short in so many ways!

That is where we are once again drawn back to the cross.

YOU HAVE NO HOPE of ever submitting to your husband,

if you do not fix your heart and mind on the grace of God found in Jesus Christ alone

That is why Jesus is calling you to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow him.

That call led you to Calvary, where you died with Christ.

But you don't merely follow him to the grave,

You follow him to the resurrection,

where you were raised with Christ,

and your life is now hidden with him

at the right hand of the Father.

Since then, you have been raised with Christ,

submit to your husband,

and give yourself for him,

as Christ has given himself for you.