

Colossians 3:18-19

Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord.
Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

(Ephesians 5:22ff "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... In this same way, husband ought to love their wives as their own bodies...However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.")

Romans 13:1 "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted and those who do so will bring judgment upon themselves."

(I Peter 2:13 "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men;... 3:1ff "Wives in the same way (reference to chapter two?) be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives...For in this way women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master...Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing may hinder your prayers."

Titus 2:3ff "(The older women) can train the younger women to love their husband and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God."

** It is important to remember these instructions in context. What has been written in the book already forms the setting for these words. Paul is writing to those who have been converted. Those who have been freed from the old nature, the old laws, the old demons. People who are called on to throw off the old way of living and put on a new way. Now come specific applications of those principles. How should that "new" way of living look in real-life situations?

Verse 17, in particular, creates the setting for 18ff. READ

If we are going to call Christ, "Lord" it will mean something in the relationships of life. Paul then spells out some of what it means when he says "wives submit and husbands love..."

New life in Christ is to transform life at the ordinary levels not just in the spectacular vices.

** it is also important to note 3:11. Having stated that in Christ old distinctions of race, religion, nationality and social status are insignificant, the Christians are not to take that principle and apply it incorrectly. There still is an order to life. Is it possible that some took the principle of 3:11 and distorted it to suggest no order between husbands and wives, slave and free, etc? Does Paul here set the record straight?

Because people in authority are sinners they sometimes abuse their position and God corrects the abuse with a call to love and absence of "harshness" (Col 3) and "giving" (Eph 5) and honor (I Pt 3).

Because people under authority are also sinners they sometimes chafe under and rebel against leadership and to minimize that and correct it God often calls us to submission because it is Gods' will (Eph 5) and to be done with respect (Eph 5) and with gentleness and a quiet spirit (I Pt 3).

It is obvious from the reading that the relationship between husbands and wives while reciprocal is not identical. There is clearly a hierarchy!

*** must look up the John passage (maybe 5) where I talked about hierarchy with equality as exemplified in the Father and Son.

The New Testament teaches a subordinationist ethic - cf I Pt 2:13-3:7; 5:1-5 etc. To announce that this is unliked by modern people is evident - sinful human nature has never liked subordination even to God.

Not until the New Testament, the Christian church do you have the obligations of the husband and father and master (marriage, parenting, and work) spelled out in such reciprocal terms. Earlier and under other cultures the duties of the wife, the child and the slave were spelled out but now the obligations of the husband, father and master are equally spelled out.

See William Barclay Colossians p 192-3 for description of ways women and wives were perceived in former times.

The Christian is not just to live his life in conformity with the prevailing culture but now in conformity to his new relationship to Christ and under his lordship.

For a wife to live under the Lordship of Christ means she will submit to her husband. For a husband to live under the Lordship of Christ means he will love his wife.

Notice that in this section (3:18-4:1) the "Lord" is reference repeatedly. v18 "in the Lord"; v20 "pleases the Lord"; v22 "reverence for the Lord"; v23 "for the Lord"; v24 "for the Lord";

The sufficiency of Christ and the Lordship of Christ have been the overriding themes of this entire letter. Here we have those same themes played out in the everyday circumstances of life.

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" is not a call to forget the everyday but to allow the new life to invade the present - the everyday of life.

Maybe some of the Christians, influenced by the teachings of false teachers, were getting so involved in angels, asceticism, and mystical knowledge that they were forgetting the practical application of Christ's Lordship in their everyday relationships.

The instruction in this section of the epistle is given in three pairs:

Wives-husbands; children-fathers; slaves-masters.

In each pair the subordinate is addressed first but in each pair the superior is equally addressed and charged with responsibilities.

The twin admonitions in each case stand together and should not be interpreted apart from the other. It is the reciprocal relationship that is being stressed in each pair.

The slave-master pair (3:22-4:1) is given the most attention probably because of Onesimus' and Philemon's relationship.

In the feminist argumentation "subordination = denigration" and "equality = indistinguishability." Whence this insight into reality? Is the Son of God slighted because He came to do the will of the Father? Is the church denigrated by her subordination to her Lord? Are church members less than "fully redeemed" on account of their submission to their pastors and elders? Are children less than fully human by virtue of their submission to their parents?" Ortlund - 104 in Recovering...

"But someone will say, "doesn't hierarchy in marriage reduce a woman to the status of a slave? Not at all. The fact that a line of authority exists from one person to another in both slavery and marriage, and, for that matter in the Holy Trinity, in the Body of Christ, in the local church, in parent-child relationships - the fact that a line of authority exists from one person to another in all of these relationships doesn't reduce them all to the logic of slavery. Feminists seem to be reasoning that because some subordination is degrading, all subordination must necessarily be degrading. " Ortlund

There is an arbitrary equation of submission with dehumanization which is unwarranted.

"Feminism insists that personal role and personal worth must go together, so that limitation in role reduces or threatens personal worth. What logic is there in such a claim? Why must my position dictate my significance? The world may reason that way. But doesn't the Gospel teach us that our glory, our worth is measured by our

personal conformity to Christ? Or have we lost confidence in the gospel's perspective on reality?" Ortlund p 111-112

"Authority doesn't authenticate my person. Authority is not a privilege to be exploited to build up my ego. Authority is a responsibility to be borne for the benefit of to hers without regard of oneself. This alone is the Christian view." Ortlund p 112

"The biblical reality of a wife's submission would take different forms depending on the quality of a husband's leadership. This can be seen best if we define submission not in terms of specific behaviors but as disposition to yield to the husband's authority and an inclination to follow his leadership. This is important to do because no submission of one human being to another is absolute. The husband does not replace Christ as the woman's supreme authority. She must never follow her husband's leadership into sin. She will not steal with him, get drunk with him, savor pornography with him or develop some deceptive scheme with him.

"But even if a Christian wife may have to stand with Christ against the sinful will of her husband, she can still have a spirit of submission - a disposition to yield. She can show by her attitude and behavior that she does not like resisting his will and that she longs for him to forsake sin and lead in righteousness so that her disposition to honor him as head can again produce harmony." Piper p 47

" A mature woman is glad when a respectful, caring, upright man offers sensitive strength and provides a pattern of appropriate initiatives in their relationship. She does not want to reverse these roles. She is glad when he is not passive. She feels herself enhanced and honored and freed by his caring strength and servant-leadership." Piper p 48

"In the home when a husband leads like Christ and wife responds like the bride of Christ, there is a harmony and mutuality that is more beautiful and more satisfying than any pattern of marriage created by man. Biblical headship for the husband is the divine calling to take primary responsibility for Christ like, servant-leadership, protection and provision in the home. Biblical submission for the wife is the divine calling to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts. This is the way of joy. For God loves his people and he loves his glory. And therefore when we follow his idea of marriage we are most satisfied and he is most glorified." Piper - 53

v 18

The Apostle "holds to a divinely instituted hierarchy in the order of creation and in this order the place of the wife comes next after her husband."(Bruce p289)

I Cor 11:3,7-9 makes the same appeal. Eph 5 makes the same appeal using "headship".

This "submission" is very different from slavery for this submission is a willing acquiescence springing out of love and is thus dictated by a wife's love and an instinctive tendency to lean on her husband for support.

The appeal is to free and responsible agents that can only be heeded voluntarily, never by means of eliminating the human will or breaking it much less by enslavement.

While it is an act of the will it is appealed to by the self-sacrificing love of the husband as the next admonition indicates.

The early idea of a wife as an "help meet" implies that she is second not principal in the administration of the household.

"as is fitting in the Lord" speaks of the this submission commencing with their union with the Lord. From the date of their conversion they had this obligation to be submissive to their husbands.

Because they belong to the Lord it is proper, fitting, that they should be submissive to their husbands.

In the Ephesian epistle wives are told in what way or to what extent they are to be submissive- "as to the Lord". Here they are told to submit because it is the proper response - a response that is in keeping with their new relationship to Christ.

The directive to wives to submit to their husbands is a recognition of the relationship that exists between those in authority and those who are subordinated. The general principle was articulated in Romans 13:1 "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities." All people, men, women, children, slaves, even masters are under authority and must be subject to the authority over them.

HCG Moule suggests that "be loyal" is a better way of representing the text because it represents a submission that is absolutely different from service and yet recognizes a God-appointed leadership.

There is an absoluteness of equality, for a husband and a wife are sacredly one. And yet in God's order of things there is an appointed leader - the husband.

Lohse (1971 Colossians and Philemon) claims the admonition for wives to submit to their husbands is nothing more than instruction for them to act in accordance with prevailing social norms. And that as norms change so to will the relationship of men wives to husbands.

But what does the word "submit" (hupatasso) mean?

To place under, to subordinate, to subject oneself, to acknowledge someone's rightful authority over,

The verb appears 23 times in Paul's writings:

In the 40 or so N.T. occurrences the verb carries an overtone of authority and submission to that authority.

The word can, as here, carry the idea of voluntary submission to the authority rather than a coerced relationship.

This conveys a disposition to yield and an inclination to follow. Thus it does not, according to I Peter 3, mean an absolute obedience regardless of the situation. For a woman is subject to an higher authority than her husband and that is Christ.

The word does not carry in itself an idea of inferiority contrary to popular opinion. This is consistent with Christ's submission to the Father (cf I Cor 15 28 where Christ is subject to the Father but of course is not in anyway inferior to Him.

Doesn't Ephesians 5:21 teach "mutual submission"?

The answer is "yes" but not in the way some mean it.

Husbands and wives have obligations to each other in submitting to each other but not in the same way. That same passage teaches that the relationship of Christ to the church is a model of what the husband-wife relationship should be. Are Christ and the church mutually submitted? Not if we mean that Christ yields to the authority of the church. But yes if we mean Christ submitted himself to suffering and death on behalf of the church and for her good. Submission can be mutual but expressed in different ways.

This willing submission is "fitting", proper, the appropriate attitude and action considering the fact that the wife is "in the Lord". As Christ willingly submitted so do we.

V 19

The implication is that the submission of the wife is gained by the love of the husband.

The admonition to love is spelled out in more detail in Eph 5 (written later).

There love is to be sacrificial, disregarding self, and defined by Christ's love.

Dr. Robert Seizer, in his book, Mortal Lessons: notes in the art of surgery, tells of performing surgery to remove a tumor in which it was necessary to sever a facial nerve, leaving a young woman's mouth permanently twisted in palsy. In Dr. Seizer's own words:

Her young husband is in the room. He stands on the opposite side of the bed, and together they seem to dwell in the evening lamp light, isolated from me, private. Who are they, I ask myself, he and this wry-mouth I have made, who gaze at and touch each other so generously, greedily? The young woman speaks. "Will my mouth always be like this? she asks. "Yes," I say, "it will. It is because the nerve is cut." She nods, and is silent.

But the young man smiles, "I like it," he says. "It is kind of cute." All at once I know who he is. I understand and I lower my gaze. One is not bold in an encounter with a god. Unmindful, he bends to kiss her crooked mouth, and I, so close, can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate to hers, to show her that their kiss still works." (from Hughes p118)

Psychology Today several years ago surveyed several hundred happily married couples to discover the secret of their success. The top two things that were said over and over again were, "my spouse is my best friend" and "I like my spouse as a person".

If a husband loves in this way he will not act in an overbearing manner.

One test of a husband's love is whether or not he acts in a bitter way toward his wife. Some wives do not live out the admonition of v18. Some wives disappoint their husbands hopes and ambitions. Some wives fail to live up to their husbands expectations.

One man I knew well was continually frustrated in his ideal of a sexual relationship. His wife just did not have the same interest. I found out that he fed himself a regular diet of pornographic and near-pornographic magazines - reading the fantasies of creative writers and assuming unwittingly that his sexual relationship had to be the same or it was unsatisfactory. What a fool.

But even if she fails to meet his expectations he is called to love her.

Instead many husbands will believe they are entitled to express their dissatisfaction by little biting, hurtful comments that depreciate their wives.

It is imperative that each do his/her part for the relationship to succeed. She must submit, respect, etc. while he must render self-sacrificing love.

It is making ourselves the "lord" we serve that we destroy others even those we claim to love.

The original order of the Creator was that a husband act in a loving manner toward his wife. Sin and self-centeredness warped that relationship into the tyranny of Eros and the slavery of sex. But with the "new life" (chapter 3) comes a new way of relating.

He must govern but he must govern in kindness.

Only one specific form of that kindly governing is spelled out here (and that negatively)- possibly one form that was lacking in the Colossian church?

In that culture a wife was but a legal concubine and the marriage relationship was not hallowed and ennobled by the Spirit of God.

Without love the relationship of men to their wives was often surly resulting in hard looks, unkind tempers.

Indifference by a husband will undoubtedly produce the kind of harshness here condemned.

Husbands are forbidden to behave in an overbearing manner or to imagine that they belong to a superior species. They are responsible for their wives and must live together with them in love.

"do not be harsh" "be not embittered" - a bitterness vented on the wife though not caused by her. "embittered" - ill tempered toward, angry with.
This is negative example of the opposite of the love to which husbands are called.

"love" your wives with a pure faithful, reverent love in which you forget yourself in devotion to them.

This love has do with an enduring and active concern for her well-being.

"Never for a moment let your leadership be mistaken for a right to irritability of temper and the miserable spirit of domestic autocracy." HCG Moule p 235

Tertullian, in an address to this wife wrote the following," How can we find words to express the happiness of that marriage which the church effects, and the oblation confirms, and the blessing seals, and angels report, and the Father ratifies. What a union of two believers, with one hope, one discipline, one service, one spirit and one flesh! Together they pray, together they prostrate themselves, and together they keep their fasts, teaching and exhorting one another, and sustaining one another. They are together at the church and the Lord's supper; they are together in straits, in persecutions, and refreshments. Neither conceals anything from the other; neither avoids the other; neither is a burden to the other; freely the sick are visited, and the needy relieved; alms without torture; sacrifices without scruple; daily diligence without hindrance; no using of the sign by stealth; no hurried salutation; no silent benediction; psalms and hymns resound between the two and they vie with each other which shall sing best to their God. Christ rejoices on hearing and beholding such things; to such person He sends His peace. Where the two are, he is Himself; and where He is, there the Evil one is not."

The Puritan theory of the family was based on a hierarchy of authority. Calvin had written, "Let the husband so rule as to be the head...of his wife. Let the woman...yield modestly to his demands."

But the husband's headship is not a ticket to privilege but a charge to responsibility.

According to John Robinson two things required of a husband are love and wisdom.

Headship did not mean tyranny but leadership based on love.

Benjamin Wadsworth wrote that a good husband will make his government of his wife as easy and gentle as possible and strive more to be loved than feared. Samuel Willard a good husband will rule as that his wife may take delight in his headship and not account it a slavery but a liberty and privilege. (from Ryken p 75-76)

MATURE MASCULINE LEADERSHIP (from Piper p 38ff)

1. Mature masculinity expresses itself not in the demand to be served, but in the strength to serve and to sacrifice for the good of woman.

Leadership is not demanding but is moving things forward to a goal. If the goal is holiness and love, there will be sweet aroma around such leadership.

Compare the Ephesians 5 description of such leadership.

2. Mature masculinity does not assume the authority of Christ over woman but advocates it. He must act like Christ but not think of himself as Christ to her. This rules out all belittling supervision and fastidious oversight. He is leading her to Christ by his leadership and conduct.

3. Mature masculinity does not presume superiority but mobilizes the strengths of others. No human leader is infallible. The aim of leadership is not to demonstrate the superiority of the leader but to bring out all the strengths of people and move them forward to a goal. Any kind of leadership that in the name of Christlike headship tends to produce in a wife personal immaturity or spiritual weakness or insecurity through excessive control or picky supervision or oppressive domination has missed the point of the analogy in Ephesians 5. Christ does not create that kind of wife (church).

4. Mature masculinity does not have to initiate every action but feels the responsibility to provide a pattern of initiative.

A wife may initiate many things and rightly so. But there should prevail a sense in which the general initiative in the family is taken by the husband.

For example the leadership pattern would be less than biblical if the wife in general was the one who initiated the prayers at mealtime, the family worship, the attendance in church and the discussion of moral standards for the family. A wife may initiate any of these discussions but if she becomes the one who generally does so - there is a problem.

Jim Dobson wrote: "A Christian man is obligated to lead his family to the best of his ability. If his family has purchased too many items on credit, then the financial

crunch is ultimately his fault. If the family never reads the Bible or seldom goes to church on Sunday, God holds the man to blame. If the children are disrespectful and disobedient, the primary responsibility lies with the father. In my view, American's greatest need is for husband to begin guiding their family, rather than pouring every physical emotional resource into the mere acquisition of money." Straight Talk p 54

5. Mature masculinity accepts the burden of the final say in disagreements between husband and wife but does not presume to use it in every instance.

IN a good marriage, decision making is focused on the husband but he is not unilateral in doing so.

Because love (her welfare ahead of his own) governs his actions, because she is equal before God in her person (likewise created in the image of God) and because she is a fellow-heir, a husband will include her thoughts and conclusions in the decision making.

Unilateral decision making is not usually a mark of leadership - but generally comes from laziness or insecurity or inconsiderate disregard.

A husband's awareness of his own sin and imperfection will guard him from thinking that following Christ gives him the ability of Christ to know what's best in every detail. Therefore he will refrain from selfishly using the power of veto but will exercise it when necessary.

6. Mature masculinity expresses itself in a family by taking the initiative in disciplining the children when both parents are present and family standard has been broken.