

WIVES

COLOSSIANS 3:18
FEBRUARY 5, 2017

¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

INTRODUCTION

Paul takes all of the “Put on” language and doesn’t just paint with broad strokes. He gets specific and applies all of what we’ve been studying to marriage. (Marriage, Fatherhood, slaves and masters) - Now it gets real.

Women: Take 30 seconds, and write down what comes to your mind when I say the word “submit”.

CONTEXT

¹⁸ Wives...

Here’s what this verse does not say: Women, submit to men as is fitting in the Lord (New Male Chauvinist Version). There’s no place in the Bible where it’s said that all women are fundamentally inferior to men. The Bible provides no room for the justification of Christian misogyny. The stories of Ruth and Rebekah in the Old Testament, the entire book of Song of Songs, and Jesus’ treatment of women in the Gospels are all evidences of how God desires for men and women to interact.

Now, the context of marriage for Paul is meant to look a certain way. This makes any male chauvinism or any misogyny an offense to God, an offense to the gospel, and an utter abuse of our role as men under the authority of Jesus Christ. There’s no place in the Church for men to hide behind a verse that God gives to women, to then use it like a club to demean, embarrass, manipulate or abuse your wife. That’s dark and demonic and dishonoring to Jesus.

Instead, the Bible advocates for equality in the standing of men and women before God. Paul speaks to this in Galatians, as does Peter. We are both “one in Christ” and “heirs with you of the grace of life”. So while there’s an equality of essence, there’s a difference in the roles that man and woman are called to in marriage.

The context is marriage. The fact that Paul addresses wives in this verse gives the context for submission. It's in the covenant relationship of marriage. He begins with the relationship between husband and wife because marriage is not an arbitrary social construct. Marriage is fundamentally a gospel issue because of what God says marriage describes — it's a picture of Jesus Christ and the church he died to save, sanctify, and make beautiful. So the gospel pertains in a very specific way to marriage in terms of how the husband and wife are to relate to one another.

COMMAND

submit to your husbands...

Now that we have the context, let's look at the command. In its original form, the word submit means "to set under". English majors will love this: the verb is also in the middle voice. For those who don't know what that means, it's an action that you do to yourself. So this verse could actually read, Wives, submit yourselves... This has the concept of putting oneself under not by compulsion, but willingly.

In the context which Paul uses it, submission does not solely equal obedience. Look at the rest of chapter 3: Obey your parents, obey your masters, but submit to your husband. It's interesting to me that he switches to a different verb in his command to wives. So how do we understand this idea?

OF GOD:

Here are other ways in the New Testament this term submit is used of God.

- Demons to Disciples (Lk 10:17)
- All Things to Christ (He 2:8; Ep 1:22)
- Creation to Jesus (He 2:7-8; Ro 8:20)
- Our Bodies to God (Ph 3:21)

OF MEN:

But particularly characteristic of New Testament usage are exhortations to voluntarily "put oneself under" the authority or direction of someone or something else.

- All Believer to God (Ja 4:7)
- People to Government (Ro 13:1; Ti 3:1; 1Pe 3:1)
- Servants to Masters (Ti 3:9; 1Pe 2:18)
- Younger Believers to Older Believers (1Pe 5:5)

- Christians to Leaders (1Co 16:15)
- Children to Parents (Lk 2:51)
- Wives to Husbands (Ep 5:22; Co 3:18; Ti 2:5; 1Pe 3:1,5)

The trouble with this is that I tend to like the idea of submission only when it's to people I love, trust, or understand. It's when I don't like the authority God has placed over me that I chafe at the idea of submission.

Keep these things in mind about Jesus: He neither lost any of His identity in submitting, nor did He lose any of the Father's love in submitting. Jesus submitted to the Word, fulfilled the prophecies given about Him, and finally went to the cross — all in submission to the Father.

We have to get beyond the misconception that either difficulty in relationships or God's command that I submit are somehow demeaning. This is where the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is of vital importance. Jesus wasn't down here doing whatever he wanted. Jesus has existed and will continue to exist in relationship to the Father.

Read John 14:31 with me: “but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.” Because we read a demeaning attitude into submission, we have to ask ourselves these questions. Did Jesus submit to the will of God the Father? Yes. Did He do it willingly? Yes. Was Jesus loved by the Father? Yes. Was it because Jesus was inferior to God or not equal to God? No.

CHARACTERISTICS

as is fitting...

Paul moves now to the characteristics of the command. He says, as is fitting. That word, fitting, means “what is appropriate” in the Greek. He uses that same word in at least two other places, Ephesians 5 and Philemon 8. The idea here is that wives who submit to their husbands is fitting in the Lord. This phrase expresses an obligation to something or a duty that is necessary. It is how God designed and commands the family to operate. Fitting presumes a standard — a standard set by the gospel which then shapes your role as a wife.

The goal of marriage is not primarily your own personal fulfillment. There's an outside goal and duty that goes along with marriage. If it's true that we didn't create marriage — God did — then much like a tool, marriage is meant to be used in a certain way and for a certain end. There's a way to be a wife that is fitting according to the design of Jesus.

Likewise, the goal of marriage is not to simply make your husband happy. The goal of a wife is to please the Lord. Now those may overlap, but they may not. There may be a time where because of faithfulness to your Savior and King, you say no to a husband who is leading into sin.

So why does God say that marriage matters? And why does your submission in marriage matter? Because it displays something about the love that God has for his Church, and the trust, humility, and rest that the Church can have because Christ gives his life for her.

COMFORT

in the Lord.

Finally, Paul gives wives comfort in the command to submit. Since order is good for us, there is no authority but that which is established by God. He loves us enough to help us order our lives our relationships and our marriages. But you can't do this.

To submit is to recognize a relationship of order established by God. However, submission to any human is always conditioned by the ultimate submission that each believer owes to God: in any hierarchy we can imagine, God stands at the "top of the chart". This means, then, that a wife will sometimes have to disobey a husband (even a Christian one) if he commands her to do something contrary to God's will. As she disobeys, though, she can continue to submit by recognizing that her husband remains as her head — just not her ultimate Head.

You'll never do this in the flesh and if you do, the strength you experience to fulfill this calling will be short lived. There's no authority but that which is established by God. Submission is always eventually Spirit empowered and Jesus centered. And there's safety in that. What you're doing is putting the truth of the gospel to work in a specific context.

In Colossians, it is only as "the Word of Christ dwells in us richly" (the Greek word describes a wealthy person) that we can behave in a Christlike way toward one another in the various relationships of life. In the parallel passage in Ephesians 5, Paul begins his discussion of family relationships by commanding us to be filled with the Spirit. Only as the Holy Spirit fills us can we live the Christlike life as wives and husbands, as parents and children, and as masters and servants.

Listen to what two women in our church have to say:

“To follow Christ, we must deny ourselves and take up his cross daily. The Bible is full of commands to do things that I obviously cannot do on my own strength. Walking with Him every day requires me to submit to Him. I see this verse as an extension of that. I am already struggling to do things that don't come naturally to me apart from the Spirit.”

“It does not depend on me trusting my husband, but me trusting the Spirit who lives in him. I can submit because I choose to trust Jesus, even when I don't feel like I trust my husband.”

This is protection too — a Christian recognizes that at the top of every hierarchy is Christ.

Let me take a moment to just say this: If you're in an abusive marriage, our pastors and elders are here to walk with you through what it means to have a marriage according to what God desires.

WHAT IF:

You have the responsibility as a wife to do something that only you can do. Submission as a wife puts something vital on display about the gospel. It's not necessarily easy, and I'm not going to say that you won't have difficulty with this. You will need the Lord and the power of His Spirit.

QUESTIONS FOR SUZANNE:

Now, let's get a woman's perspective on this idea of submission. It's one thing to hear it from a pastor, but it's another to hear it from someone who is called to do this as a wife. I'd like for my wife, Suzanne, to come up and answer a few questions about the command to submit.

What comes to your mind when you think about submission?

If I just think about the word submission, the reason I don't like it really falls into one of two categories:

1. **Pride:** I think I know what's best, or I don't need someone to tell me what to do, or I don't want to be seen as weak, or I want to be in control. All of these things are seen in the Fall of Genesis 3. My sin desire is to rule my husband.
2. **Vulnerable:** I also tend to fear that I will be taken advantage of, or that my opinion/thoughts don't matter and I will not be heard.

I think each of our personal experiences influence our response in fear, especially if you have been abused or have had a wrong understanding of these verses forced upon you. That can make processing submission as something for your good really challenging.

My life experience, by the grace of God, is that I have a father who treated my mother and I with kindness and respect and a husband who has done the same. Because of that, my struggle is more with pride and submission.

Bottom line, if I'm not looking at submission as God designed it in the context of His Word, the reason I don't like it apart from my own sin is because of a lack of trust. I don't think that the person I'm submitting to has my best interest in mind.

What has changed or challenged the way you think about submission?

Reading all those submission passages in context and the Holy Spirit maturing me.

At this point, I have read and thought on all those submission passages so many times that I usually gloss over it because I don't really have beef with the word submission anymore. You know how you can read the Bible and know what it says, but then there are times when you read the Bible and something literally jumps off the page at you? Like how have I never seen this here before! This week I saw all these verses in a totally new context. Look at how God addresses us in verse 12: "chosen of God, holy and beloved". That's the language of someone who loves me perfectly looking out for my best interest. I know this is not new information here, but it's such a sweet reminder as He asks me to do all these things that I need his help to do. And then looking at verses 3-17 as a whole, I know that verse 18 is coming right behind it. When you see it all together, it actually becomes a really beautiful and tender picture of being cared for by a husband who is compassionate, kind, humble and gentle, bearing with me and forgiving me. That's what I hoped marriage would be like.

What would you think about submitting to a husband who has...

"put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him — So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

The way God designed it, I think submission is beautiful and much less scary. But even when my husband isn't all these things or doesn't do all these things, I can still submit

because ultimately I'm submitting to the Lord. He is trustworthy, He knows my thoughts from afar, and He cares for me and works all things together for the good of those who love Him.

What does submission look like in practice?

In general, it's probably my attitude and body language. In a Word, respect both in private and in public. I don't feel like there are a lot of examples in our seven years of marriage where I have struggled with submission over an event or decision. I can think of one when we were moving here from Texas, and the only other one is having to come up here and do this. Public speaking to large groups — not my favorite. So that's my real life application for this week.

Isn't it pleasant to be around a couple where the husband is kind and the wife respects her husband? Any Fixer-Upper fans here this morning? Back when I first started watching the show — even before I knew anything about Chip and Joanna — I wondered if they were Christians because of the way that they interacted. Now, granted they are on TV and I don't know them personally, but when you see people who have a marriage like that it makes you want to be around them. People who love Jesus and are being conformed by the Holy Spirit should be people that you want to be around.

Titus 2: What does it mean to “revile the word of God?”

I can bring honor to the Word of God by submitting to my husband. I am saying I trust what God says is best and I will do it because I love Him.

What would you think of God's Word if I said, “Yes, I love Jesus!” but refused to do what He said. What would happen in my home if my kids watched me continually be unsubmitive and unrepentant? How would they view God's Word?

Anything else you'd like to add?

I think it's important here to address that if you are single and hoping to marry, the importance is marrying a man who loves Jesus. Do not compromise on this! It can be hard to submit. Husbands who are in Christ need the Holy Spirit to help them be the husband that God has called them to be, and they still don't do it perfectly. You will make obeying God's instructions to submit to your husband much more more difficult for yourself by choosing to compromise.