

Colossians Chapter 3 v 18 & 19

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[0 : 00] So, we're particularly thinking of Colossians 3 in verse 18 and 19. Paul, in his letter already in Colossians, just as a recap, has been giving thanks to God for what God has been doing in the Christians' lives.

He's particularly been exalting Jesus, lifting up Jesus, giving us that wonderful vision of who he is. There in chapter 1, verse 15, he's the image of the invisible God. He's then been talking about his own struggles and difficulties in the Christian life, and particularly he's been concerned for the Christians here because there's been these false teachers, legalists particularly, who've been trying to bind the believers and stop them from enjoying the freedom that Christ has won for them.

And rather than being bound to these empty rules, Paul has been showing them that living the Christian life is one which is simply putting Christ first and recognizing who he is and what he's done.

And so, he's gone through generalities in one sense and then into verse 15. If we pick up from verse 15 in chapter 3, we'll just read from there just to give that sense of context.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart, since as members of one body you are called to peace and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

[1 : 40] And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. And so on. Children, masters, etc. There's several good books on the market on the matter of Christian marriage.

And one of those books is quite an old one now, written by a man called Rob Parsons. It's called Loving Against the Odds. And I picked up one of the points that he had in there.

He talks about a medieval method of resolving arguments between a husband and a wife. At least it is medieval in the rest of the country. It may be present in Yorkshire.

I don't know. But anyway, you can tell me if that's the case or not. He writes this. Arguments were settled by physical combat. And as women were not as tall as men, husband was placed at a disadvantage by having to fight from within a hip-deep hole.

[2 : 44] He was given a club. His wife addressed with an extra long sleeve into the end of which a heavy stone had been sewn. If, circling the hole and her husband carefully, the wife managed to brain her husband, it was assumed that she was on the right side.

On the other hand, if the man managed to grab hold of his wife's sleeve and drag her into the hole so subduing her, it was taken that he had been in the right all along. How many of us now wish we could return to the good old days?

I think in the book, Rob Parsons tells his wife about this. He says, she thinks we should try it. She says, can't we try something new instead? So, anyway. Humorous as it is.

The matter of marriage is, of course, very personal. It's a matter of great sensitivity. A matter of great concern to us.

And always has been. And what we have before us in God's Word, as with every other aspect of our lives, is God's ideal.

[3 : 58] God's, in one sense, blueprint for living and enjoying life, whether that be married or single, as God desires. Fulfilling our high calling to be God's children.

Remember, that's really the sense here, isn't it? There, verse 12 of Colossians 3. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. That's who we are.

And being God's people, being one of his children, being part of his family, means that there is no part of our lives which is unaffected and untouched by the presence of God and the care and direction of God.

And so, in these instructions that we have here, and particularly also in Ephesians 5, we see marriage as God views it and how we are to aim for it with his help and grace.

I want us just to turn back to Ephesians 5 for a moment because I think there are some very important principles before we come back to Colossians as Paul enlarges on this matter of Christian marriage.

[5 : 07] And he lays out three things, three basic principles that help us understand how we are to live as husband and wife. The first thing is this, is that God views Christian marriage as two people living as one.

That's what Christian marriage should be, two people living as one. It's particularly there in verse 28 where Paul speaks in the same way husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.

And then later on, of course, he brings out that teaching concerning verse 31, For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.

The two will become one. He's talking all the way back to that creation ordinance as God created the world, made Adam and Eve, two people becoming one.

And therefore, this is the principle. If you harm your wife, you harm yourself. And if you hurt your husband, you hurt yourself. It's as simple as that.

[6 : 12] The two have become one self, one marriage, one couple, one flesh. Is that how we view our marriages?

Or do we say, this is my money and that's my time. This is my space and my house and so on and so on. It should not be the case.

It is ours. Perhaps even in our wedding vows, we said something along the lines of, All that is mine I give to you. And all that is yours you keep.

No, no, not at all. All that is yours you give to me. Two becoming one. That's the principle. It's important. Two are one. One of the reasons why marriages often are very sad, unhappy and failing is because two people live two separate lives.

Begins with two becoming one. Secondly, the principle here, and it's throughout the whole Bible, but it's particularly exalted and highlighted here is this, is that marriage is actually about Christ and his church.

[7 : 21] All the way through, there's that sense, husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church. And verse 25, husband gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her.

Later on, verse 32, this is a profound mystery. We're talking about Christ and the church. God has given to humanity. God has instituted marriage. It's his to give.

It's not for governments to legislate about and to change the meaning of. God gave marriage, one man, one woman, and he gave it as a gift to humanity so that ultimately it may resemble and highlight Christ's relationship with his church, his love for his people.

That's the chief purpose. Marriage is a great blessing to society. It's the very foundation for a healthy society. But ultimately, God gave marriage to show, as a picture, Christ and his church.

And our marriages, dear Christian friends, should also reveal to the world the love of Christ for the church. Our marriages are meant to be something which glorifies Jesus.

[8 : 39] It's not just about me and you or us. It's about him. And thirdly, we see just a basic principle as well as this, and it's obvious, I know, but marriage is love in action.

You see, marriage is love in action. It's about Christ's love for us, our love for him, and then our love for our partner.

Marriage is about love in action, love for Christ in action, and then love for one another in action. Why should a wife, a Christian wife, submit to her husband in everything, as Paul says here?

Why should a Christian husband love his wife, as sacrificially as Christ loved the church? Because Christ loves you, and he only calls you to do what is best for you.

All of God's commandments are for our good, aren't they? Everything that God calls us to do, he does because he loves us, and he calls us to do those things because we love him. And in loving him and following him, we actually do for ourselves the very best we could possibly do, because we're doing his will.

[9 : 57] That's what we have here. Verse 22. For our husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the saviour. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.

We'll come up to this again in a moment. So now let's turn back to Colossians. We've had those three principles. Marriage is to become one. It is a picture of Christ and his church, and it is love in action.

A loveless marriage is an awful, sad, terrible thing, because it does not display love of Christ for his church. Well, let's look at these verses here. Very simple.

They're much shorter, but they're saying the same thing. Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Verse 18. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Now let's be very clear again that these are not optional extras to the Christian life.

Neither are they simply cultural to the time that they were written. In other words, they're of a bygone age, of an ignorant age. Yes, wives, submit to husbands then, 2,000 years ago, but now, of course, we are much more liberated and free, and therefore that word is an anathema to us and 21st century women that we should submit to our husbands.

[11 : 15] And husbands and wives, well, let's be honest, you don't, you know, you can love them for a while, can't you? And then if you get a bit bored or you fall out of love, well, then, of course, the marriage can be dissolved.

It isn't forever. Now, these are God's words for all time, all generations, all ages, all people. That's why we believe that the Bible is, as it declares itself to be, the very breathed-out word of God.

So these are not cultural to be changed when we don't like them anymore, as any other part of God's word cannot be changed when we don't like it anymore or doesn't fit with our society or our way of thinking. We cannot make excuses or excuse ourselves from God's word, whatever our experience or the experience of our society.

As we thought already, God's primary purpose in giving the gift of a wife to a husband or a husband to a wife is to make known the mystery and the wonder of Christ and his church to the whole world.

So, let's look at these things. Let's think about these commands. Another very good and helpful book on the matter of Christian marriage is Selwyn Hughes, Marriage as God Intended, and I've picked a few thoughts of his brain.

[12 : 37] I won't blame him for everything that I say, and I don't say that I've taken everything from him, but some of these thoughts are his. Let's look at this first one then. Let's take them in the order. Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting to the Lord.

What does that phrase mean? Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting to the Lord. Notice it's not a blanket statement. Wives, submit to your husbands, full talk. That's the end. As is fitting in the Lord. It's saying this.

A Christian wife submits to her husband as part of her discipleship under the mastery of Jesus, her Lord. Wives are to submit to their husbands as a fruit of their submission to Jesus.

Did you notice back in Ephesians in chapter 5, I read 21 for the very reason it says, submit to one another. Every single one of us is to submit to one another, whether we're male or female or not, because we have reverence for the Lord.

For women that means, for wives rather, that means submitting to her husband because she submits to Christ. If we are true Christians, if we are real disciples of Jesus, then what is it that we have decided to do?

[13 : 45] We've decided to be followers of Jesus and we've acknowledged and recognized him as the Lord of our lives and we are submissive to him. And what Paul is saying is this.

If we are submissive to the Lord Jesus, his command for Christian wives is to be submissive to the husband that he's given you, not out of a sense of inferiority, but out of faith that God knows best and that he can be trusted when we obey him.

Now why do we submit to Jesus, male and female? Why do we submit to Jesus? Because we've already said we submit to Jesus as the Lord of our lives because we trust him, because we know that he loves us, because we know that he's always working for the best for us, because we know that he will not do anything to harm us.

What has been a very unhelpful suggestion and understanding of this phrase has been that wives submit to their husbands because husbands are superior.

That is utter, utter rubbish and it is not biblical. It's not biblical. The Bible makes it very clear. In fact, one of the wonderful things about the Lord Jesus and the teaching of the New Testament is this, is that in a society in which women were inferior or counted as inferior, Christ exalted women to equality with men.

[15 : 14] So we have in the gospel, there is no longer male nor female, Gentile nor Jew, slave or free, for you're all sons of God in Christ Jesus.

That's the wonderful thing about the gospel. It raises us all up to the same level. And the wonderful truth is this, that if we think submission must mean that we're inferior, then we are not understanding the person of Jesus Christ in his relationship to God the Father.

In 1 Corinthians and chapter 11 and verse 3, Paul writes concerning Christ. We know that in his life we see how in the Garden of Gethsemane he said, not my will but yours be done.

In 1 Corinthians 11 verse 3, now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ. The head of the woman, that's the husband and wife, is man. The head of Christ is God.

So does that mean that Christ, the Son of God, is inferior or unequal with God the Father? No, it doesn't. Does it mean that the wife who submits to her husband is unequal and inferior to her husband?

[16 : 26] No, it doesn't. So if we have a right understanding of Christ, then we have a right understanding of our relationship to him and to one another. What does that practically mean?

What does it practically mean then to submit? Again, that's been so badly twisted in history and in the present day that somehow a wife must do every single thing her husband says without question.

That isn't the case. What does it practically mean? It means this. It means for a Christian wife that she transfers to him the responsibility for final decisions.

He has to carry the buck, basically, in a relationship. As Christians, in our walk with the Lord Jesus Christ, we look to him for direction, we look to him for guidance.

And as a Christian wife, it does not mean that you shouldn't talk about decisions that affect the home. You should talk together about decisions that affect the home. And if you think your husband is wrong in the decision he's made, then you should tell him and speak to him about it and point it out to him.

[17 : 33] But once you've done that and once you've talked it over and once you have been able to sit together and discuss the matter, if at the end of the matter you don't see eye to eye, then ultimately you have to let your husband carry the can and trust God that he's bigger than your husband's failings.

The difficulty with a sermon like this is, I want to be so personal but I don't want to embarrass my wife. But she more often than not is right and I'm wrong. Now that's recorded, isn't it?

I can't get out of it. But she often, often has trusted me or rather trusted the Lord that when we've made a decision and talked together that if it's not been the right one that God will work it out.

See that's an expression of faith in Christ, isn't it? It's not faith in the husband primarily, it's faith in Christ. That he'll work things out. He's bigger than mistakes.

He's bigger than our foolishness. That means though because I think it's hard and I appreciate it's hard, it means that if perhaps you as a Christian wife have found that you've been taking the lead in your marriage, then you need perhaps to start giving a bit more responsibility back.

[18 : 58] If you don't consult with your husband about how you spend money and you just do whatever you like and say, well it's my money, again we're back to the problem, you're not two as one.

You need to begin to talk with him. Remember to entrust God with the husband that he's given you. Now clearly, and again this is, you know, I'm sort of saying this because people have then said, oh well if you submit to your husband, then whatever he says in the end goes.

No it doesn't because if a husband, Christian or not, is committing a sin, then it is not the wife's place to submit to him. If he says to you, Christian wife, well come on, let's get together and I want you to fiddle the taxes with me because I don't want to pay all this money and I want to do a loophole and it's wrong, I know it's breaking the law, but as a Christian wife, you're not to submit to him.

And if he calls you to do something which you know is contrary to God's word and contrary to what God has declared, then no, you're not to submit to him because ultimately you're under the authority of Christ firstly and so is he.

And if he steps outside of the authority of Christ and starts to do those things which are sinful and wrong, then in one sense then he has removed himself from that position of headship.

[20 : 24] We mustn't try to make scripture nonsense by saying that whatever is said by the husband the wife must do, that makes nonsense of it.

So she is to transfer to him some of the responsibility, let him carry the can. But also it means respecting as well, that came out at the end of Ephesians 5, wives are to respect your husbands.

Now we respect Christ, don't we? Those of us who trust him and know we have wonderful respect for him because of the love he has for us and all that he's done for us.

We've built up in one sense that respect and that trust in him. But dear Christian wives, you are to respect your husband because he's the one that God has given to you at this time and because he has done very many things for you.

He's the one who cares for you. Again, there's that sense in Ephesians 5 where Paul speaks about feeding the body and caring for the body and he's saying this is how the husband is with his wife.

[21 : 34] He looks after her, he provides for her. That isn't always the case, it isn't in every situation but often it is the case. Husband is to care for his wife, provide for her, to do things for her, to support her, to help her and that should be responded with respect.

One of the things that we must be very careful of, rather you, Christian wives, must be very careful of is belittling your husband and the things that he does. Don't keep criticizing him.

Don't keep complaining about his failures every time he gets something wrong. That's one sure way to both of you having disrespect for one another and perhaps for bitterness coming in as well.

Look out for good things that he does. They're there somewhere if you look hard enough. You'll be able to find some, I'm sure. Give him the benefit of the doubts in decisions he makes.

Let him see that there is respect. Again, not kowtowing, not worshipping or any of those silly things, but respect, healthy respect that doesn't belittle, put down or undermine.

[22 : 52] Now, what about the husband? That's just a few thoughts, really, and there's much more perhaps we could say, but those are few thoughts on this wife submitting to your husband. What about the husband? How is he to be a good husband?

Well, husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them. One of the things I think we need to point out whenever people criticize, wives submit to your husbands, I think we need to point out that actually for the husband he has been given a much more difficult challenge.

Love your wives as Christ loved the church. Goodness me, how on earth can any husband love his wife as Christ loved the church? Gave himself, died for her. One of the obvious things is this, as Christian husbands we're to make our love for our wives plain.

they're to know that they're loved. Now men and women are different. That's why we're compatible. That's why God made a woman and a man and put them together in a marriage because we are not to be competitive with one another but to complement one another because we have different strengths, different weaknesses, different skills, different ways of thinking.

And one of the things particularly that's different about women and men is that wives need to be told that they're loved. Don't you? You need to be told you're loved. You need to be shown that you're loved.

[24 : 12] Men can be a bit insensitive, put it that way, and just go through life. Don't need to be told they're loved every day. It's nice when it happens occasionally but wives need to know they're loved.

And again, think how often if we're to love our wives as Christ loved the church, think how often Christ tells us of his love for us. Doesn't he? How he told his disciples, how he loved them.

How we're told again and again of the love of God for us. Just go to the New Testament, try and count how many times the Bible talks about the love of Christ for his people. He knows that we need it and so he tells us and tells us and tells us and even then we still doubt it, don't we?

So husbands, don't let your wives be in any doubt that you love them. Be tender with them. Take hold of their hand from time to time. Yes, buy them a bunch of flowers from time to time.

Not just Valentine's Day or anniversaries or when you've done something wrong. Note to self. Surprise them with gifts of love, tokens of love, words of love.

[25 : 23] And that means ultimately of course because we are to love our wives as Christ loved the church then that love must be costly at times and include sacrifice. When did I last give up something for my wife?

By that I mean when did I lose something for her? Like losing the opportunity to watch the football or losing the opportunity for time with myself in the shed or losing time and opportunity to read that book.

You see, if there isn't any sacrifice in our love then how can we be sure that it is going to be love like Christ sacrificed himself at the cross for us?

We have to pay to make our love known, dear husbands. It has to hurt a bit. You see, self-centeredness in us as husbands can be hidden behind a career, can't it?

Self-centeredness can be hidden behind doing DIY. It can be hidden behind our own hobbies or interests but really in the end those things are self-centeredness.

[26 : 36] They're not sacrificial love and that's not a love that's anything like the love of Christ. If we say to our wives I'm sorry I'm too busy this week to spend time with you is it actually that we're hiding?

or are we really showing love that costs? Then we have this little part here at the end of verse 19 do not be harsh with them.

How terrible it is when a husband becomes a bully or a wife beater. You see, we don't have to just be wife beaters to be bullies, husbands.

Peter rightly remarks when he writes to husbands and wives in his first letter he says to the husbands there about the way that they are to treat their wives.

1 Peter in chapter 3 and verse 7 Husbands in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and heirs with you of the gracious gift of life.

[27 : 49] Again, that's another verse in the Bible that people like to jump upon and say, well, there's the Bible saying that women and wives are the weaker vessels or the weaker partner.

It's putting them down. It's condescending. No, it's not. The fact of the matter is that, ladies, you are weaker. That's a generally accepted truth. You're not as big.

You're not as strong as men. God has made us differently again to be compatible. Why has God given to men strength? So that they can help the weak. Not that they can overpower them and bully them.

But being big and strong can also mean that we can be harsher, hurtful, thoughtless, insensitive. And that shouldn't be the case at all.

Ladies are much more sensitive than men to things that are said and done. Doesn't mean that it's necessarily a fault. It's not. It's what makes them special.

[28 : 50] It's what makes them thoughtful. It's what makes them considerate. What makes them such good mums. And so, Christian husbands, what are you like with your wife?

Are you sulky when your dinner is not on the table when you think it should be? Do you go into a rage when you need a shirt for work and you think it's your right that she should have ironed it?

What's wrong with you? Can't you pick up an iron? Wouldn't know what to do with it, of course, but you could at least pick it up and try. Sometimes there's an arrogant assumption that we are such good husbands that we're too good for our wives.

How foolish that is. if we expect our wives to be gracious and patient with us and our faults and our mistakes, how much more so should we also be patient and gentle with our wives?

Think of the Lord Jesus Christ, dear Christian husband. How many times has he forgiven you, your sins and faults and failures? How does he constantly forgive you?

[30 : 04] when you feel like moaning, complaining, look at yourself. Just finally, in this part to Christian husbands, if we are to love our wives and not be harsh with them, then we need to listen to them.

Need to listen to them. Christ listens to our prayers. We're to listen to our wives. Yes, we've been given this incredible duty, responsibility, burden at times to be the head of our home and our family but it doesn't mean we've got the corner and all the wisdom.

It doesn't mean we know everything. What was it the woman said? She said, when I was a young girl I wanted to marry Mr. Wright. I just didn't realise his first name was always. Think about it.

We don't have all the answers. We need our wives to give us a different perspective on a situation or a circumstance. We need them to see the details. As men we often just see the great big wood and we see the big picture.

We need our wives to help us to see the smaller things which are just as important. We will miss them, those vital insights and we will make poor decisions and be poor husbands and fathers if we fail to listen and talk through with our wives.

[31 : 26] Important matters concerning our families. When I say listen to our wives I don't mean and again I've got to be so careful that I don't personalise this. Listening just to keep her quiet.

You know what I mean. Yes dear. Yes dear. The ear is attached to the head but the brain is not attached to the ear. We need to in humility recognise that God can speak through her as much as he can speak through us and sometimes he does more so.

So dear friends it's an immense challenge isn't it? We all fall short. We all get it wrong. We all need of course the Lord's help.

That's why again Colossians has been all about the work of God in our lives. As Christians we are not as we once were. As Christians we are not as the world is.

Its standards its way of doing things is different. we have been changed and transformed by the power of God's spirit and by his grace. Here's Paul's prayer for the Christian husbands and wives at the very start of Colossians 1 verse 9 for this reason.

[32 : 41] We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding and we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way bearing fruit in every good work growing in the knowledge of God being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you might have great endurance patience and patience.

Dear friends we need to recognize we cannot do this on our own we cannot be godly men and women husbands and wives without the Lord's help and this is where I then turn to you dear friends who are not married please pray for those in the church who are married those of you who have had all the experience of marriage pray for those who are in the midst of it pray for those who are single in our churches the young people that they would make godly wise matches and partnerships and dear friends those of us who are married let's not disobey the word of God but when we see that we are at fault come to him in repentance and look to him with faith that we might know his grace to be those who reflect the love of Christ in our lives and marriages too let's briefly pray for a moment let's just briefly quiet our hearts for a moment perhaps as I've been preaching as we've been thinking about what God's been saying things have come to mind where we haven't been as loving as we should have been or thoughtful or whatever it may be let's just ask for God's help and let's pray oh Lord our God you know us completely and you know where we are you know us whether we're widowed and still feeling the loss of that life partner comfort us we pray for those of us

Lord who have not yet engaged in marriage Lord who are single and looking to you to provide that soul mate for life pray oh Lord that you would help us to follow you firstly knowing that you are the one who provides we pray for those of us Lord you've called to singleness and have lived all our lives as single we thank you for the privilege that you've given us in being able to serve you wholeheartedly we pray again that you would help us to be content and happy in the position that you've blessed us with we pray for those of us who are married Lord whether long or short years we pray for our spouse our partner help us to love them more help us to listen to them more help us to be more godly as the partner we should be we pray that you'd richly bless them and encourage them and help them and we particularly pray Lord for those of us who've got non-Christian partners oh Lord save them make our lives to be attractive and make the gospel attractive that they might see what they're missing and want to come to know you that we might be truly united in

Christ as husband and wife together for those of us who are Christians with our Christian husband and wife help us every day to give thanks for him and for her help us not to take them for granted help us not to neglect them help us oh Lord to love them as you would have us love them and so Lord we give you our thanks and praise that oh Lord you are the one who gives us grace in every circumstance and situation we find ourselves that we might live for you amen