

Marriage God's Way (Part 4)

Introduction: Please open your Bibles to Colossians 3:18-19.

In the 16th century the **Anglican Church** published **the Book of Common Prayer** as a liturgical guide for services in the church, including wedding ceremonies. According to the Book of Common Prayer, in the wedding service a woman is to make the following vows...

“Will you have this man to be your wedded husband to live together after God’s ordinance, in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him, in sickness, and in health, and forsaking all others, keep only unto him, so long as you both shall live?”

What stands out in those vows and is perhaps even shocking to our modern 21st century ears is the word “obey.” When a woman married in the Anglican church she vowed to obey her husband. This applied even to royalty. For example, in 1947 when **Queen Elizabeth** married **Prince Philip**, in keeping with Anglican tradition, she vowed to obey her husband.

But in 1981 when **Lady Diana** married **Prince Charles** the word “obey” was omitted from her wedding vows. And when **Kate Middleton** married **Prince William** she too omitted the word “obey” from her wedding vows (2011) as did **Meghan Markle** when she married **Prince Harry** (2018). It is also noteworthy that the modern version of the Book of Common Prayer omits the word “obey,” not because the Bible has changed, but because the culture has changed.

So I ask you: Is the word “obey” to strong or inappropriate in wedding vows? As you ponder that question I remind you that the Apostle Peter used the word “obey” when he gave instructions to wives in **1 Peter 3:6** when he said: “just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.”

Very few things are as offensive to our world today as the idea that a wife is to obey and submit to her husband. But that is in fact what the Bible teaches as we are being reminded in our current series on marriage.

Proposition: We are studying the great subject of marriage under **four main headings**. And this morning we return to our second main heading...

I. Before You Say I Might (Singleness/Dating).

II. Before You Say I Do (Marriage).

No one should enter into marriage lightly.

Under this heading we are thinking about **marriage as a building** which is upheld and supported by **five pillars**. Every Christian must know these five pillars before you say “I do” in marriage.

This morning we will continue to look at the fourth pillar...

A. The Institution of Marriage.

B. The Design of Marriage.

C. The Corruption of Marriage.

D. The Roles of Marriage.

Given that there is so much confusion and controversy regarding the roles of marriage, this particular pillar requires more time and thought.

Last time we began to look at...

1. The role of wives: Willing submission.

From **Colossians 3:18** and other passages we are extracting a biblical theology of submission. So far we have seen...

- a. The fact of submission.**
- b. The meaning of submission.**
- c. The details of submission.**

Under the details of submission we saw that...

1) It's a limited submission.

A wife is not called to submit to all men or to all husbands. She is called to submit to *her* husband.

Secondly, we saw that...

2) It's a voluntary submission.

Paul is not calling for husbands to **subjugate** their wives. A husband is not permitted to force his wife into submission. Instead Paul is calling for wives to voluntarily and willfully submit to their husbands.

Thirdly, we saw that...

3) It's a coequal submission.

When Paul calls wives to submit to their husbands, he is not teaching that men are **superior** or that women are **inferior**. Men and women enjoy a marvelous equality in creation and in Christ. Men and women are created equally in the image of God. And believing men and women are one in Christ. Men and women are equal in creation and in Christ and yet they are not the same. By God's good and wise design men and women have unique gender specific roles which includes a wife's submission to her husband as her equal partner in the grace of life.

Fourthly, we saw that...

4) It's a one directional submission.

Paul does not call for husbands and wives to both submit to each other. Submission in marriage is **not mutual**. Submission in marriage is **not two directional**. It is one directional in that a wife is to submit to her husband.

Fifthly, we saw that...

5) It's a worshipful submission.

Wives are to submit to their husbands in a such a way that it is **an act of worship to God**. She is to submit "as is fitting in the Lord." A wife's submission to her husband is **a God-centered reality**. Submission in marriage is much bigger than the husband. It is ultimately about God.

That brings us to where we left off last time. There are **two more details** about submission that

we see in the Bible which brings us to...

6) It's a modeled submission.

For this we turn to **Ephesians 5:22-24**. Is there a model that a wife is to follow in her submission to her husband? Yes. The church (v. 24).

Wives, **if you want an example** of how you are to relate to your husband, **look at the church's submission to Christ**. And how does the church submit to Christ? Voluntarily, respectfully, sincerely, wholeheartedly, and joyfully. This is the pattern that you are to follow in your marriage. The church's submission to Christ is the model of the wife's submission to her husband. It is a **modeled submission**.

Seventhly and finally...

7) It's a comprehensive submission.

For this we look at **Ephesians 5:24** where Paul states that **the scope** of a wife's submission to her husband is to be: "in everything." There are **no qualifications or limitations** given here. A wife is to submit to her husband "in everything." that is in every aspect of life. She is not to submit in some areas of life but not others. No, she is called to submit "in everything." It is a **comprehensive submission**.

These are the seven details of submission. It's a limited, voluntary, coequal, one directional, worshipful, modeled, and comprehensive submission.

A **summary** of **Ephesians 5:22-24**: Wives, you glorify God in your marriage when you voluntarily submit to the leadership of your husband (v. 22a), as an act of obedience and worship to the Lord (v. 22b), because you acknowledge his headship over you as Christ is the head of the church (v. 23), and you follow the pattern of the church's submission to Christ (v. 24a) in every area of life (v. 24b).

Now, there is one more thing for us to consider regarding submission which I am calling...

d. The clarifications of submission.

There are many wrongs ways of thinking about submission. And so it is critical that we clarify what submission in marriage **doesn't mean**. I have ten clarifications.

1) Submission doesn't mean that the wife is to **put her husband in the place of Christ**.

This means two things: First of all, a husband is not the **king of the home**, Jesus is. While a wife is under her husband's authority her ultimate authority is not her husband, but Christ. Secondly, wives put your **hope in God**, not in your husband.

2) Submission doesn't mean that the wife is to **view her husband as infallible**.

Most of you don't need to be convinced of this because it is already so apparent. But it needs to be said. A husband is not always going to be right. He is not always going to do what is wise. He is a fallen person just like the wife is. And so wives do not expect perfection from your husband. Expect him to fail and make mistakes. And when he does, instead of grumbling and criticizing him, be patient and gracious. And pray for him to be able to lead you and your family well.

3) Submission doesn't mean that the wife is to **give up independent thought**.

When a woman marries she does not leave her brain at the altar. Submission doesn't mean that a wife has to agree with her husband on everything. She may have different ideas and opinions that she is free to express to her husband. But she is to do so in a respectful and submissive manner.

4) Submission doesn't mean that the wife is to **be afraid of or intimidated by her husband**. If a wife is afraid of her husband or if she is afraid of speaking to her husband, something is terribly wrong. A husband should be approachable, welcoming, warm, inviting, and a safe refuge for his wife.

5) Submission doesn't mean that the wife **can't try to influence her husband's decisions for good** (she is his helper).

My best counselor is my wife. Wives can and should give counsel to their husbands especially when they think their husbands are making wrong or unwise decisions. The excellent wife in **Proverbs 31** "opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue" (v. 26). One of the most important aspects of marriage is communication. Shelley and I talk about everything together. We talk through decisions together. And if I am making a bad or unwise decision, I want her to tell me. I welcome that. This is one way she can help me.

6) Submission doesn't mean that the wife is to not **use her gifts, skills, and talents**. Every Christian wife has been gifted by God in various ways. And she is free to use her gifts, skills, and talents in her home, in the church, and in the community.

7) Submission doesn't mean that the wife is **to give in to every demand by her husband**. As we learned from **Ephesians 5**, the scope of a wife's submission is "in everything." But there may be times when a wife not only **can** but **must** refuse to submit to her husband, **if and when he attempts to lead her into sin**. As a Christian, the wife's ultimate authority is Christ to whom she is to obey even over against the will of her husband. And so if a husband tells his wife to do something that the Bible forbids or forbids her from doing something that the Bible commands, **she must respectfully refuse**. For example, if a husband tells his wife to cheat on their taxes, she must refuse. Wives, you are to submit to your husbands **in everything that is lawful** in the eyes of God.

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

Even if/when you must refuse to submit to your husband, you can/should do so in a spirit of submission and respect.

8) Submission doesn't mean that a wife is **to ignore and never confront her husband's sin**. If the husband is sinning the wife has every right and even the responsibility to lovingly confront him. This is one of many ways that a wife shows love to her husband.

9) Submission doesn't mean that a wife is **to be controlled by her husband**.

I recently heard about a husband who expected his wife to ask his permission to go to the bathroom. That is not biblical submission. That is a gross distortion of male headship. Male headship does not give license for a husband to control his wife.

10) Submission doesn't mean that a wife is **to tolerate abuse from her husband, be it emotional or physical.**

One of the most common arguments by egalitarians is that male headship leads to abuse. Is that true? Does male headship and submission in marriage lead to abuse? No. If abuse occurs in marriage, it is not God's good and wise design that is at fault. Abuse is a distortion of God's design. If a husband is abusive to his wife, he is sinning and violating God's design of marriage. And if a wife is being abused she needs to contact the proper authorities, the elders of the church, the police, whomever. Listen wives, if your husband becomes abusive with you, you come to us (Rick and me, or someone else in the church), and we will help you and protect you.

Women, before you marry, make sure that that man is someone whose leadership you can follow. If you can't follow him, then don't marry him.

That brings us now to...

2. The role of husbands: Loving leadership.

The role of a wife can be very difficult and challenging. Submission in marriage is not easy. But I would argue that the role of a husband is even more difficult. And I say that because it is harder to lead than to follow.

Let's look at **Colossians 3:19**. You will observe that Paul **directly addresses** the husbands in the church. And with respect to their role in the marriage relationship Paul gives them **one overarching command...**

"Husbands, love your wives"

The one overarching command that Paul gives to wives is **to submit** to their husbands. And the one overarching command that Paul gives to husbands is **to love** their wives. When wives and husbands live this way in their marriage it is a beautiful, God honoring relationship.

Now, the first thing I want you understand here in **v. 19** is that Paul's teaching was absolutely **revolutionary**. Because we are already so familiar with what the Bible teaches, it is easy for us to miss the revolutionary character of this command for husbands to love their wives.

This teaching was **revolutionary** because it was **counter cultural** to how marriage was viewed in the ancient world both in the **pagan world** and in **Judaism**.

Skevington Wood, "In Greco-Roman society it was recognized that wives had obligations to their husbands, but not vice versa."

Think about that. Just the bare fact that Paul gives husbands a command of any kind regarding their responsibility in marriage was revolutionary in the ancient world. Husbands normally did whatever they wanted in marriage. But in a *Christian* marriage, wives have obligations and so do husbands. That was stunning to hear in the 1st century.

And so the fact that Paul gives a command to Christian husbands is in itself revolutionary. But **the content of the command** was even more revolutionary: “Husbands, love your wives.”

Now, given the fact that Paul commands Christian wives to submit to their husbands in **v. 18**, we might **expect** him to say something like this: “Husbands, lead your wives” or “Husbands, exercise authority over your wives.” But that’s not what he says. Instead he says, “Husbands, love your wives.” That is so powerful!

There are at least **two reasons** why Paul does not explicitly tell husbands to lead their wives:

1. First of all, because he doesn’t need to. By virtue of what he says to wives in **v. 18**, it is already understood that God has designed the husband to be the leader in the marriage. If a wife is to submit to her husband, his leadership role is assumed. We see the same thing in **Ephesians 5:23** when Paul says to wives: “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church.” And so Paul doesn’t need to tell husbands to lead their wives because their leadership role is already established in his instruction to wives.

2. Secondly, Paul does not explicitly tell husbands to lead their wives **because his greatest concern** at this point is not **that** husbands would lead their wives, but **how** they would lead their wives. **That** the husband is the leader in marriage is **a given**. But **how** the husband exercises his leadership role within the marriage is **not a given**. And so instead of telling the husbands to exercise their authority, he tells them **how** they are to exercise their authority within marriage, namely they must **lead with love**. Think of it this way: For the husband, authority is not the priority, love is. Paul is in no way diminishing the leadership role of the husband. He has already established it. But his greatest concern for husbands is for them **to express their leadership in love**. They are to exercise **loving leadership**.

Husbands, you are the leader in your marriage. And that is a huge responsibility. But when you think about your relationship to your wife, do you think primarily of yourself in terms of authority or love?

You show me a husband who is preoccupied with his authority in the marriage, and I will show you a wife who is to be pitied.

Now, the verb “love” in **v. 19** is a **command**. Therefore it is **not optional** for a Christian husband to love his wife. To love his wife is a matter of obedience to God. Husbands, you are under God’s authority. And God commands you to love your wife. To not do so is sin.

Furthermore, the verb “love” is in the **present tense** meaning that **this is to be a way of life for Christian husbands**. You are to love your wife not just on your wedding day, not just on your honeymoon, not just on her birthday, not just on your anniversary, and not just on Valentine’s Day. You are to love your wife **all the time as a way of life**.

But what does it mean to love your wife? The basic, general answer is this: To love your wife is **to seek her highest good**. To love your wife is **to speak to her and treat her** in such a way that you actively seek her highest good.

Therefore **love is the antidote to the two major failures** husbands tend to make: **tyranny and passivity**. **To be a dictator in the home** is a sinful tendency of husbands. And **to abdicate leadership responsibility** in the home is another sinful tendency of husbands. Both tyranny and passivity fall woefully short of God's design for husbands. If a Christian husband seeks the highest good of his wife he will not be a tyrant in his leadership, nor will he be passive in his leadership because neither of these seek the highest good of his wife.

But how is a Christian husband specifically to love his wife? Is there an example that a Christian husband is to follow?

The answer is "yes." And it is found in **Ephesians 5** where the Apostle Paul gives the most extensive teaching that we have in the NT on marriage (5:22-33). In this passage Paul first addresses the wives in **vv. 22-24**. And then he addresses the husbands in **vv. 25-33**.

I want you to observe how Paul tells husbands in this passage to love their wives, not once, not twice, but three times...

Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives."

Ephesians 5:28, "So husbands ought also to love their own wives."

Ephesians 5:33, "Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife."

There is no doubt that the one, overarching responsibility that a Christian husband has is to love his wife. But again, what does a husband's love for his wife specifically look like in marriage?

Paul begins his instruction to husbands with **the command to love** their wives (5:25a). Then in the rest of the passage he **shows how** a husband is to love his wife (5:25b-33).

He gives several **characteristics of a husband's love** the first of which is...

a. Sacrificial love (v. 25).

"Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her," In **vv. 22-24** Paul says that wives are to **follow the pattern of the church's submission to Christ**. And here Paul says that husbands are to **follow the pattern of Christ's love for the church**. And how does Christ love the church? With sacrificial love. Jesus so loved the church that He gave Himself up for her as the great sacrifice for our sins.

Husbands, you are to sacrifice yourself for the highest good of your wife. You are to love your wife with a Calvary like love. You are to love your wife sacrificially.

This can take many forms:

1. This might mean saying "no" to a **promotion at work**.

2. This might mean saying "no" to a **recreational activity**.

3. This certainly means **really listening to your wife**. It means that you have meaningful conversations with her so that you can find out what her needs are and then seek to meet them.

4. This means that you **work hard to understand what makes your wife feel loved.**

As we have said before, submission in marriage is one directional. A husband is not called to submit to his wife. But he is called to do something far greater, to sacrifice himself for the highest good of his wife.

Owen Strachan, “A husband images Christ when he looks at his wife and thinks: ‘I would die for that woman. Gladly.’”

Husbands, can you say that about your wife? Do you sacrifice yourself for the highest good of your wife?

Conclusion: When I was in seminary every student took the same classes with five exceptions. We were each given **five electives**. And because we had so few electives, I was very careful in how I used them. Because I wanted to improve my Hebrew I took **two Hebrew electives** (the exegesis of Isaiah and the exegesis of Psalms). Because I wanted to improve my Greek I took **one Greek elective** (the exegesis of Revelation). Because there is so much confusion surrounding the book of Acts I took **the Exposition of Acts**. And because there is so much controversy surrounding manhood and womanhood, with my other elective I took a class on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood which was taught by a guest lecturer, **Wayne Grudem**.

Wayne Grudem is one of the most significant theologians of our time. For many years he taught at **Trinity Evangelical Divinity School** in the Chicago area which is a prominent evangelical school. But his wife **Margaret** was injured in a car accident and the cold winters of Chicago became very painful for her. So Wayne decided that they needed to **move to a warmer climate**.

He looked in the **Phoenix phonebook** and discovered that there was a seminary in Phoenix. So he resigned from the prestigious school in Chicago and moved to Phoenix to work at a mostly unknown school out of love for his wife. This is an example of what it means for a husband to sacrificially love his wife. Wayne Grudem told this story in our class and it has never left me. I respect Wayne Grudem as a theologian. But I respect him even more as a husband.

There is much more to say about husbands but we will have to wait until next time.