

Week 7

# WIVES, SUBMIT TO YOUR HUSBANDS

---

Colossians 3:18

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

(Colossians 3:18, ESV)  
.....

## Introduction

The Christ-Centered Life is one that impacts everything. If Jesus is the most important relationship you have, it will impact all the aspects of your life, big or small. Therefore, we shouldn't be surprised to see that Jesus impacts the way married couples live together and the way that families interact. This text provides the first of three family oriented studies that flesh out how households should treat one another in light of who Jesus is and what he's done for us.

This first command, "Wives, submit to your husbands," is admittedly controversial, even among some Christians. This is in part because of so many abuses and misunderstandings of what the Bible teaches about the roles of men and women. Nonetheless, if we take the Bible seriously, we must come to terms with what this text says. The only way to avoid this truth is to get out your scissors and cut it out of the multiple places it occurs in the Scriptures (see Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3 for other examples).

While some wives have a difficult time accepting this command, countless others have experienced the blessing of obeying it. They have seen God work in powerful ways as they have let their husbands lead and have embraced their God-given role as helper. This is because God's commands are life-giving and good. Obeying God's commands is not only the right thing to do, but a better, richer way to live.

Because of the difficulty of this passage, we've included a few extra resources and articles that might help you process some of the challenging questions or implications of this command (see the "Other Issues" section).

# Investigation

Read Colossians 3:18.

1. What does it mean that wives should “submit to their husbands”?
2. Paul says that submission by wives should happen in a way that “is fitting in the Lord.” What does this mean? Why is it important?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 11:3. How does this verse shed light on how husbands and wives can be equal in status but differing in role?
4. Read Ephesians 5:18-22, the parallel passage to Colossians 3:16-18. Notice that Paul says in Ephesians 5:21 that all believers should be “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” How does this impact our understanding of what it does and doesn’t mean for wives to submit?



4. Life-stage application question:

- a. Married Women – What is one specific way you that you can better follow your husband’s leadership?
- b. Married Men – What is one specific way that you can cultivate a submissive spirit in your wife? (Other than telling her to submit... bad idea!)
- c. Single Women – How can you prepare yourself now to be a Colossians 3:18 woman if you are married at some point in the future?
- d. Single Men – What does this teach you about the kind of woman you should be pursuing for marriage?

## Other Issues:

### **How can a woman faithfully submit to her husband?**

The following principles may be helpful:

#### Wives are to follow their husband’s leadership

Husbands are commanded to love their wives as Jesus loves the Church (Eph. 5:25); Jesus *died* for the Church. Jesus’ example guards against chauvinism and other abuses of the principle of submission.

#### Ways a husband can handle disagreements with his wife:

1. Pray and discuss with your wife. Be patient. Wait for her to come around.
2. Appeal to a higher authority (pastor/counselor).
3. If the matter is pressing and/or a decision cannot be reached, the husband must decide. His wife should submit to the decision.

#### Wives are to preach wordless sermons

Those who have unbelieving husbands should not nag or be preachy, but rather love, serve, and respect their husbands, praying that God would use these actions to soften the husband’s heart.

## Wives are to cultivate true beauty

There is nothing wrong with outward beauty, but it is “fleeting and deceptive” (Prov. 31:30). Holiness is true beauty. Godly wives have a quiet and gentle spirit; they are not silent, but prudent (knowing when and where to speak).

## Wives should seek to know exemplary women

Peter gives Sarah as an example, and the Bible is clear that she is flawed. She is exemplary for her honesty and repentance, not because she is perfect; she ultimately did submit to God and to her husband.

## Wives should fight fear

Fear (*what if it doesn't work out? what if I'm unhappy? what if my husband makes a bad decision?*) makes life miserable and should be fought against by faith.

## Submission Does Not Mean:

1. A husband is in ultimate authority.
2. A wife does not have independent thoughts.
3. A wife does not seek to influence her husband.
4. A wife must obey her husband's command to sin.
5. A wife is less intelligent or competent than her husband.

## Submission Does Mean:

1. A husband and wife are equal with complementary roles.
2. Wives are to submit like Jesus did in Gethsemane (Luke 22:42).
3. Husbands are to lovingly lead like Jesus does the Church (Eph. 5:25).
4. A single woman should only marry a man she can follow.
5. Christian marriage shows the Trinity and the gospel.<sup>11</sup>

## **How does a wife submit to her husband as is fitting in the Lord if he is not leading well? What if he's a jerk?**

In his sermon, “Women of Valor for Non-Promise Keepers,” John Piper answers this question well. He says:

1. *Submission does not mean agreeing with everything your husband says.* You can see that in verse one: she is a Christian and he is not. He has one set of ideas about ultimate reality. She has another. Peter calls her to be submissive while assuming she will not submit to his view of the most important thing in the world—God. So submission can't mean submitting to agree with all her husband thinks.

---

<sup>11</sup> Mark Driscoll, “Marriage and Women” (Sermon given 3/15/09 at Mars Hill Church). Notes available online at <http://blog.marshillchurch.org/2009/03/17/notes-marriage-and-women/>

2. *Submission does not mean leaving your brain or your will at the wedding altar.* It is not the inability or the unwillingness to think for yourself. Here is a woman who heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. She thought about it. She assessed the truth claims of Jesus. She apprehended in her heart the beauty and worth Christ and his work, and she chose him. Her husband heard it also. Other wise Peter probably wouldn't say he "disobeyed the word." He has heard the word and he has thought about it. And he has not chosen Christ. She thought for herself and she acted. And Peter does not tell her to retreat from that commitment.
3. *Submission does not mean avoiding every effort to change a husband.* The whole point of this text is to tell a wife how to "win" her husband. Verse one says, "Be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won." If you didn't care about the Biblical context you might say, "Submission has to mean, taking a husband the way he is and not trying to change him." But if you care about the context, you conclude that submission, paradoxically, is a strategy for changing him.  
  
The goal of this text is to help wives bring about the most profound change in their husbands that can be imagined—the transformation from being a spiritually dead unbeliever to a spiritually alive believer. Submission does not say, "I renounce all efforts to change my husband." What it does say we'll see in a moment.
4. *Submission does not mean putting the will of the husband before the will of Christ.* The text clearly teaches that the wife is a follower of Jesus before and above being a follower of her husband. He is going on the path of unbelief. She does not follow him in that, because she has been called to be a disciple of Jesus. Submission to Jesus relativizes submission to husbands—and governments and employers and parents. When Sara calls Abraham "lord" in verse 6, it is lord with a little "l". It's like "sir." And the obedience she renders is secondary obedience, under, and because of, and filtered through obedience to the LORD with a capital "L".
5. *Submission does not mean that a wife gets her personal, spiritual strength from her husband.* A good husband should indeed strengthen and build up and sustain his wife. He should be a source of strength. There are ways in which a wife is the "weaker vessel" as verse 7 says. But what this text shows is that when a husband's spiritual nurturing and leadership is lacking, a Christian wife is not bereft of strength. Submission does not mean she is dependent on him to supply her strength of faith and virtue and character. The text assumes just the opposite. She is summoned to develop depth and strength and character not from her husband but for her husband. Verse five says that her hope is in God, not the husband.
6. Finally *submission does not mean that a wife is to act out of fear.* Verse 6b says, "You have become [Sarah's] children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear." In other words submission is free, not coerced by fear.

The Christian woman is a free woman. When she submits to her husband—whether he is a believer or unbeliever—she does it in freedom, not out of fear.

Piper next asks: *What then is submission?* He answers:

It is the disposition to follow a husband's authority and an inclination to yield to his leadership. It is an attitude that says, "I delight for you to take the initiative in our family. I am glad when you take responsibility for things and lead with love. I don't flourish when you are passive and I have to make sure the family works." But the attitude of Christian submission also says, "It grieves me when you venture into sinful acts and want to take me with you. You know I can't do that. I have no desire to resist you. On the contrary, I flourish most when I can respond creatively and joyfully to your lead; but I can't follow you into sin, as much as I love to honor your leadership in our marriage. Christ is my King."<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> John Piper, "Women of Valor for Non-Promise Keepers" (Sermon given 9/4/94 at Bethlehem Baptist Church). Notes available online at

[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1994/881\\_Women\\_of\\_Valor\\_For\\_NonPromise\\_Keepers/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1994/881_Women_of_Valor_For_NonPromise_Keepers/)

# Sermon Notes