

WIVES, SUBMIT
Colossians 3:18
By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Today we are going to study what may be the most hated verse in the Bible. It is about the wife's role in marriage – submission.

II. THE BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE

1. Because our society has departed so far from the Bible, before we talk about the wife's role in marriage, and the husband's role in marriage, I want to begin with the Biblical definition of marriage.

2. Marriage is the union of one man and one woman for a lifetime.

3. TEN PARAMETERS OF BIBLICAL MARRIAGE

- i. Marriage is monogamous. One man and one woman, not one man with multiple wives; not multiple men with multiple wives. **Matthew 19:5** "... and the two will become one."
- ii. Marriage is heterosexual. Not homosexual. **Matthew 19:4** "... he who created them in the beginning made them male and female."
- iii. Marriage is sexual. A marriage is a sexual relationship. This is what distinguishes a marriage from other close relationships. Not only is marriage the single relationship in which we can enjoy the gift of sex, but the Bible forbids married people from withholding this gift from their spouse (1 Cor 7:5). **Matthew 19:5** "... and the two will become one flesh."
- iv. Marriage is exclusive. The Bible forbids "open relationships," or "swinging." Sex is only for the context of marriage. **Hebrews 13:4** "Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers."
- v. Marriage is primary. It is the most important human relationship on earth. Marriage comes before parents, siblings, friends, and children. **Matthew 19:5** "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife."
- vi. Marriage is permanent. God forbids divorce. **Matthew 19:6** "Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."
- vii. Marriage is covenantal. It is not merely a contract between two people, but a vow to each other and to God. Even if the couple does not believe in God, God recognizes their marriage and will hold them accountable. **Matthew 19:6** "... what God has joined together."
- viii. Marriage is missional. Marriage has a three-fold purpose. 1) To display the glory of the gospel. The husband's love and the wife's submission are a visible sermon of the relationship between Christ and His church (Eph 5:22-33). 2) Human happiness. Marriage is one of God's greatest blessings to mankind. **Genesis 2:18** "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him." **Proverbs 18:22** "A man who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord." 3) To procreate and raise the

next generation for God. **Malachi 2:15 (ERV)** "God wants husbands and wives to become one body and one spirit. Why? So that they would have holy children and protect that spiritual unity."

- ix. Marriage is submissive. God commands both the husband and wife to submit in marriage. The wife must submit to headship -- the husband's leadership. **Ephesians 5:22** "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord." The husband must submit to sacrificial love. **Ephesians 5:25** "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her." This leads to practical applications like **Dr. Willard Harley's** policy of joint agreement -- "Never do anything without an enthusiastic agreement between you and your spouse."
- x. Marriage is oneness. In marriage, they are no longer two, but one. Everything is shared. Independence is gone. The bed is shared. Money is shared. Property and possessions are shared. Decisions are shared. Secrets are shared. Feelings are shared. Trials are shared. Successes are shared. Dreams and goals are shared. God is shared. **Matthew 19:6** "Since they are no longer two, but one flesh."

III. TEXT

1. **Colossians 3:18-25** "18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and don't be bitter toward them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they won't become discouraged. 22 Slaves, obey your human masters in everything. Don't work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people, 24 knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism."
2. Paul focuses on three relationships – wives and husbands; children and parents; slaves and masters.
3. In each relationship, he begins with the duties of the lower rank. He begins with wives, children, and slaves. Why? There may be two reasons, but we can only speculate.
 - i. The primary duty of wives, children, and slaves is submission. And submission is the hardest task.
 - ii. He may have put the lower rank first to imply that although they are lower in rank, they are equal in dignity.
4. Today we are going to focus on the first part of the first relationship – wives. Paul's instruction for them is to submit to their husbands as is fitting in the Lord.
5. But submission is not a unique command only given to wives.
 - i. James 4:7 commands all Christians to submit to God.
 - ii. Luke 2:51 says that Jesus submitted to His earthly parents when He was a child – and all Christian children are called to submit to their parents.

- iii. Romans 13:1 says that all Christians are to submit to the government – to obey the law.
- iv. Titus 2:9 says that all Christian employees are to submit or be obedient to their bosses at work.
- v. 1 Peter 5:5 says that all church members must submit to their pastor when it comes to church matters.
- vi. Ephesians 5:21 says that all Christians are to submit to one another in the fear of Christ.

IV. WHAT SUBMISSION DOES NOT MEAN

1. The call to submission does not mean women are inferior to men.
 - i. The Bible does not teach that women are less valuable, or less intelligent, or less loved by God. And submission does not imply that.
 - ii. For example, as a Christian employee you are called to submit to your boss; does that mean you are inferior to your boss?
 - iii. The Bible says that Christ submits to God the Father (1 Cor 15:28); does that mean Christ is inferior in any way? No.
 - iv. The Bible says that men and women are both created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27); they have equal access to salvation (Gl 3:28); and they share an equal destiny in heaven (1 Pet 3:7).
 - v. Submission is more about order than value and ability.
 - vi. The **NIV Study Bible** puts it this way. “Inferiority is not implied by this passage. The submission is one of role or function necessary for the orderly operation of the home.”
 - vii. Consider a basketball team. The players are required to submit to the coach. But that doesn’t mean that the coach is the most valuable member of the team; that doesn’t mean that the coach is the smartest person on the team. But for the sake of harmony, health, and order, for the sake effectiveness, the players must submit to the coach.
 - viii. Men and women are equal in value, but different in the roles that God has called them to. God has called the husband to love and lead, and the wife to submit and support.
 - ix. **Someone** said “Biblical submission isn’t yielding to your husband’s will. It is embracing the order Christ established and submitting to Him.”
2. The call to submission does not mean that the husband has to make all the decisions alone.
 - i. Some mistake submission in marriage to mean that the wife is not to have any say. She is not to give her opinion. She is not to try to sway her husband one way or another. He is not even supposed to ask for her opinion. He is the decision maker, and she is just supposed to live with whatever he decides. That’s not submission.
 - ii. The wife is free to give her opinion; and to offer insight; and the husband and wife can and should put their heads together when they make decisions.

- iii. Two heads are better than one. As a married couple you will make much better decisions when you make them together than if the husband makes them alone.
 - iv. The leader is not always the smartest person in the room. The leader is rarely the smartest person in the room.
 - v. A good leader is one who surrounds himself with smart people.
 - vi. A good leader admits it when he doesn't know, and he surrounds himself with people who do know.
 - vii. Wives, you may be smarter than your husband, but that doesn't mean you should be the leader. That means you need to help the leader make wise decisions.
 - viii. As well, husbands, just because God made you the leader, that doesn't mean you are smarter than your wife.
 - ix. In my marriage, one of us is very intelligent, and one of us is very tall. Guess which one is which? My wife is much smarter than me, so I rely heavily on her decision making.
3. The call to submission does not mean that wives can't make any decisions alone.
- i. Some mistake submission to mean that the husband must be involved in every decision. That's not the case.
 - ii. Just because you are in charge doesn't mean you need to micromanage every little detail in your family.
 - iii. In my family, Lydia makes a lot of decisions without me.
 - iv. She chooses the kids' school curriculum, and organizes their day. She chooses how to decorate and arrange the house. On most days she even chooses my outfit. She chooses our meals. She chooses how the kids dress. I could go on and on.
 - v. I read this story in one of Dave Ramsey's books. He heard it somewhere, and he wasn't sure if it was true, so I'm definitely not sure. But it's a good story. George and Barbara Bush were in the presidential limo driving back from an event. They were driving on some back roads, and the driver had to pull over for gas. The old service station owner popped out of the door with his mouth gaping open at the sign of the president's limo sitting in front of his gas pump. When Mrs. Bush saw him through the window, she jumped out of the car, ran up to him, and gave him a great big hug. They talked for a few minutes, and then she got back in the limo. She turned to President Bush and said, "That's Harry, my old high school boyfriend!" George got a big grin on his face, leaned back, and said, "So let me get this straight. If you had married him, you'd be the wife of a gas-station attendant. But instead, you married me, the most powerful man in the world, and you got to be the First Lady of the U.S." Barbara looked back at him with a sparkle in her eye and said, "Oh George, don't be silly! If I had married him, he would be president!"
 - vi. If a husband is smart, he will recognize the universal truth in this story.
 - vii. We are far more successful with our wives than we would be without them.

- viii. Submission does not mean that the wife is inferior; it doesn't mean that she can't be involved in the decision-making process; and it doesn't mean that the husband can't delegate some decisions to her.
- ix. On the contrary, a wise husband will get his wife very involved in the decision-making process.
- x. So now, let's look at what submission does mean.
- xi. Now I want you to know, wives, that I got these points from a woman. These points come from a wonderful little book called, *A Woman After God's Own Heart*, by Elizabeth George. And she got these points right from Scripture.

V. A DESCRIPTION OF SUBMISSION

1. The WHAT of submission: Voluntarily allow your husband to be your leader, giving him the final say.
 - i. This is what it means to submit. Voluntarily allow your husband to be your leader, giving him the final say.
 - ii. Author **Elizabeth George** writes, "Submission is primarily a military term meaning to rank oneself under someone else. This heart attitude is lived out by subjection and obedience, by leaving things to the judgment of another person and yielding or deferring to the opinion or authority of someone else (*A Woman After God's Won Heart*, p. 65)."
 - iii. Again, it doesn't mean the wife can't be involved in the decision-making process, or offer insight. But in the end, the wife let's her husband have the final say.
 - iv. Notice that I used the word "voluntarily." Submission is the wife's decision. It's really between her and the Lord. The Bible does not command husbands to bring their wives under submission, or to discipline their wives when they disobey. Submission is the wife's decision.
2. The HOW of submission: Unconditional and respectful.
 - i. **Colossians 3:18** "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."
 - ii. First, submission needs to be unconditional.
 1. The Bible doesn't say submit to your husband when you feel like it; or if he's being good to you; or if he is meeting your needs; or if this or that. The Bible says to submit unconditionally.
 2. Now on the surface that sounds very challenging, but isn't that similar to what God calls husbands to do? God calls husbands to love their wives unconditionally – not just when she smells good and looks pretty; not just when she's meeting your emotional needs; not just when she's fun to live with; not just when she's healthy; not just when she's young; but you are to love your wife unconditionally. In the same way, wives are to submit to their husbands unconditionally.
 3. I found this quote by author **Emerson Eggerichs** to be very challenging. He wrote the book, *Love and Respect*. "The problem many women have today – including Christian wives – is that they

- want to be treated like a princess, but deep down they resist treating their husbands like the king.”
4. Emerson Eggerichs writes about the Rewarded Cycle. “His love regardless of her respect; her respect regardless of his love.”
- iii. Second, submission needs to be respectful.
 1. **Ephesians 5:33** “To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.”
 2. Just as the church should obey Christ with a good attitude, respectfully, you are called to submit respectfully.
 3. Let your husband have the final say, and do it respectfully. That means don’t criticize him; don’t complain; and don’t rub it in his face if the decision turns out bad.
 3. The SCOPE of submission: Submit to your husband in everything.
 - i. **Ephesians 5:24** “Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything.”
 - ii. You are to let your husband have the final say in every area of your life. Do you know what everything means? Everything.
 - iii. Now there is one exception to this. You must not submit to your husband if he is leading you to disobey God. In that case you must say what the Pater and the apostles said in **Acts 5:29 (NLT)** “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” So if your husband is leading you to sin, or to do something illegal, then you not only have the freedom to not submit, you must not submit. God comes before your husband.
 - iv. **Colossians 3:18** “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”
 1. “As is fitting in the Lord” – as is appropriate for a Christian woman.
 4. The STRENGTH of submission: Trust in the Lord to take care of you through your husband’s leadership.
 - i. This is all very challenging. Where do you find the strength to submit like this? It comes from faith. You have to have faith that God will take care of you through your husband’s leadership. You have to believe that if God commands you to submit to your husband, then God is big enough to take care of you through your husband’s leadership, even when your husband makes bad decisions.
 - ii. Remember **Matthew 6:31-33** 31 So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.”
 5. The MOTIVE of submission: Submit in order to win your husband over to a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - i. Why does God want you to submit to your husband?

- ii. **1 Peter 3:1** “In the same way, wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the word, they may be won over without a word by the way their wives live.”
- iii. This verse was written to Christian wives who had unbelieving husbands. And Peter said that your best tool to evangelize your husband, to win him to Christ, is not to preach to him, not to argue with him, but to submit to him. And there’s something magnetic, and attractive, and winsome about godly submission.
- iv. And I believe this also applies to women who have Christian husbands who are backslidden. How do you influence him to turn back to the Lord? Your best tool is submission. There’s something about submission that God can use to grab your husband’s heart and pull Him to the Lord.

VI. SECONDARY APPLICATIONS

1. Marriages either succeed or fail based on submission. The cause of every failed marriage is a lack of submission.
 - i. The husband and wife must both submit to Christ.
 1. **Chip Ingram** “To best experience the dance of marriage, we must have mutual submission to the choreographer.”
 2. If a husband is subject to Christ, then he is going to be a great husband. If a wife is subject to Christ, she will make a great wife.
 3. **Someone** said “You must renew your commitment to the Lord in order to renew your commitment to your spouse.”
 4. “The most important day in your marriage is the day you make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life.”
 - ii. The wife must submit to her husband.
 - iii. The husband must submit to Christlike love. If a husband would love his wife the way Christ loves the church, it would be easy for his wife to submit to his leadership.
2. Husbands must be Christlike leaders. They are the designated leaders in the relationships. They must study and become the kind of leaders that are worth following.
3. Single women must only marry a man that they want to submit to. Watch how he treats his mother.
4. Single men must only marry a woman who is submissive. Watch how she treats her parents. “Only marry someone if you want to spend all your time with them.” Don’t marry a rebel.

VII. CONCLUSION

1. The world’s view of marriage is this: Singleness is great; dating is great; engagement is great; but marriage is a drag. But that’s not true. Marriage is one of God’s greatest blessings to mankind, as long as we do things God’s way.
2. Submission may sound outdated, old-fashioned, counter-intuitive, and sexist. But God created you. And He created your husband. And He is love. If you want the best marriage you can have, then trust in God’s marriage instructions.