

Flint Hills Bible Church
Biblical Soul Care Sunday School
Colossians 3:18 - Submission

I. Introduction

We have come to a verse in Colossians which culturally we have loaded with a lot of baggage. One of the quickest ways to have a contentious conversation with unbelievers is to talk of authority in general, and if you want to turn up the heat a bit more, talk about wives submitting to husbands! Before we begin this lesson on this important call to wives, we would be wise to remember the context.

Paul is writing to a young church who is surrounded by a sinful culture, with views of marriage that are unredeemed to say the least. Paul has been instructing the Colossians up to this point in aligning their thinking and living with their new identity in Christ. They are no longer living for themselves. He began by helping them behold Christ in chapter 1:15-19, and reminds them that this glorious Christ has redeemed them from a life of enslavement to sin.

Christians are to walk in Christ as they received him - by faith. They are to put off their old body of flesh and walk in the freedom Christ has purchased for them (2:11-15).

Paul calls them to apply this freedom from false religion by faith in Christ. He warns them to not continue relying on experiences and harsh treatment of their bodies to be godly (2:16-23)

In chapter 3 Paul turns their attention to daily living. He calls them to live in light of eternity. Their true life is with Christ, and their future is glorious - with Christ in glory. This serves as a motivation for every believer to put away sinful behavior and habits, and to put on Christlike living.

The Christian life is so remarkably different because we now have compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience (3:12). We forgive one another and are bound together with love (v 13). We experience the peace of Christ as we remember His word and live in close community with other believers who remind us about it as well. We do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus (v17)

Paul shows us how all of these beautiful realities work out in our core relationships. How does my new identity in Christ and my new eternal life with Him affect my closest earthly relationships and responsibilities?

And so we begin where Paul does - Marriage. Today we are looking at God's call to wives in Colossians 3:18. We will talk about why this trait of submission is so important to every believer, and how it applies in a Christian marriage.

1. Why is submission such a difficult subject for the world, and for Christians?

II. What it says

Colossians 3:18 (ESV)

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

2. Just looking at this verse alone, what can we notice?
 - Who is Paul addressing? Who is he not addressing?
 - What is the main command?
 - How is the command qualified, or clarified?

III. What it means

We will take the three main parts of this verse and examine each more closely. We want to have a biblical understanding of what God is calling wives to do in this verse.

a. *Submit*

The Greek word translate submit is used 38 times in the NT (23 are in Paul's letters). The core Greek word is *hypotasso* from two roots: hypo - under and tasso - order. The word in the new testament means to be under or subject to an authority.

Gotquestions.org had this definition:

“Submission is a yielding to the will or authority of another. To submit is to surrender to the choice or control of someone else.”

Here are a few of the ways it is used in the NT:

Submission to God!

James 4:6–7 (ESV)

⁶But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

(see also Heb 12:9, or just about any other place in the Bible)

Submission to governing authorities:

1 Peter 2:13–14 (ESV)

¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

(see also Rom. 13:1-7, Titus 3:1)

Submission to Pastors/Elders:

1 Peter 5:5 (ESV)

⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

(see also Heb 13:17, 1 Thess 5:12-13)

Submission to masters:

1 Peter 2:18–20 (ESV)

¹⁸ Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

(see also Col 3:22-24, Eph 6:5-9)

3. What can we infer about authority and submission in God's design?

Submission in the life of Christ

Submission to the Father:

John 3:16–17 (ESV)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Philippians 2:5–11 (ESV)

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

4. Describe Jesus' submission in these verses:

Submission to earthly parents:

Luke 2:51 (ESV)

⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

Submission to government:

Mark 12:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.

John 19:9–11 (ESV)

⁹ He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" ¹¹ Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

5. How does Jesus' submission in these different instances inform our understanding of submission?

6. What is the result when Christians do not submit to the authorities that God gives us?

7. Are there limits to our submission to these authorities?

Submission of Wives in Marriage

Colossians 3:18 (ESV)

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

b. "as is fitting"

This phrase adds clarity to submission by directing wives to seek out what is appropriate, wise and good for one who has redeemed and is experiencing life free from bondage to sin. Wives are called to submit to their husbands in a way that fits with the situation and setting.

8. What does this phrase add to our understanding of a wife's submission to her husband?

9. Can a new wife copy the exact submission of her mentor and apply it to her own marriage?

c. “in the Lord.”

Paul also adds the phrase in the Lord to help wives frame their fitting submission as good and right for a believer united with Christ. This clarification helps in two ways - first it affirms submission as God’s good design for the marriage relationship, and second, frees a wife from going along with her husband’s sinful requests. If a husband asks his wife to do something sinful, she has the responsibility to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Now to include additional elements from other texts, let’s briefly look at other texts with submission in marriage:

Ephesians 5:22–24 (ESV) — 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Ephesians 5:31–33 (ESV) — 31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” **32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. **33** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

10. How does Paul add to our understanding of a wife’s submission to her husband in Ephesians 5?

11. What is the most difficult part of this text for unbelievers and even our own flesh?

1 Peter 3:1–6 (ESV) — 1 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, **2** when they see your respectful and pure conduct. **3** Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— **4** but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. **5** For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, **6** as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

12. How does Peter add to our understanding of submission of wives to husbands?

13. What objections to biblical submission does Peter address here?

Titus 2:3–5 (ESV) — 3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, **4** and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, **5** to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

How do wives learn to be godly wives?

What does Paul say is at risk with unsubmitive wives?

Summary:

In this brief yet direct command to Christian wives, Paul helps us see how the truth of Christ applies to the most intimate human relationship - marriage. As we consider this wonderful and counter-cultural call to wives, we will undoubtedly face resistance in our own marriages, as well as in those we counsel. Let's consider some objections to the biblical teaching on submission and some application scenarios.

IV. Application

*Becky Hintz has a helpful WEW message from 2016 entitled "I'm Supposed to do WHAT?!" where she lists 12 things submission does not mean. You can find that on the church website.

14. Let's talk about the application of these truths to life circumstances. How would you counsel Rhonda who has been married to Burt for 20 years, and has felt neglected and unappreciated for much of their marriage?

15. Murrilla was married later in her life than she planned. As a new bride at the age of 46, she has found marriage to be a great deal harder than she anticipated. Her new husband Frank is very particular about how he wants their new household to be ordered and kept. Murrilla has some strong reactions to this. How do you counsel her?

16. Shirley has come to you asking how she should submit to her fiance Ted, who is asking her to change the way she dresses, and who she talks to. When she showed hesitancy, he told her "the Bible says you're supposed to submit and follow my leadership." What is your counsel to Shirley?

17. Natasha is a teenager who wants to someday be a godly wife. She reads Colossians 3:18 and asks you what she can do to begin cultivating submission in her character now, before she is dating anyone. What do you suggest to her?