Husbands and Wives

Colossians 3:18-19

November 1, 2026

We are in Colossians 3:18 to 19 today, so you can turn there in your Bibles, Colossians 3:18 to 19. If you're a husband, if you are a wife, well, these two verses are directly relevant to you. And if you are not a husband or you're not a wife, these two verses are still instructive for you, but in an indirect way as they involve principles that pertain to the nature of men and women, all according to God's design.

In fact, these verses are relevant for all of us, no matter our age or status, male or female, because they pertain to very general, broad principles of authority and submission, but also a specific principle as we were identifying some of those specific principles last time.

But here as a very specific principle, the principle of loving fellowship. Loving fellowship that animates the most fundamental social unit, which is marriage. But it's also

something loving fellowship that we learn by observing godly Christian marriages and their loving fellowship as we observe them. We all learn about that precious gift of loving fellowship and learn how to grow in it. If you found your way to Colossians 3:18 follow along as I read these two verses on Paul's marital instructions.

"Wives, be subject to your husband's as is fitting in the Lord." And then verse 19, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them." That instruction is brilliant in its simplicity and its concision. And if we would just practice that consistently, if we would do what it says according to its meaning and its intent, there'd never again be marital disharmony.

No cross words between spouses, no sins committed, no hurt, no sadness, but nothing, but pure marital bliss, delightful joy of loving fellowship. We smile and chuckle a little bit because we know that, man, that's not always my lived reality. But it is the intention of God, and it is the intention of Christ for you, and it is the intention of the Apostle Paul.

We know we are pursuing obedience in a hostile context, a highly psychologized age, a thoroughly feminized culture. We live in a time that's kind of characterized in the public square

by victim language, opposition to authority. There is out there, no doubt about it, an Antichrist culture; Christ rejecting Bible hating system that really tries to pit us against one another, not just husbands and wives, but parents and children, slaves and masters or workers and bosses.

It is a a time of great disunity and acrimony. We get that. We understand the world we live in very well. We live in it. We see it all around us. We can't get away from it. It comes to us through our media as we try to just catch up on Daily News. It's out there. But as we, as Christians, by virtue of our setting out to follow Christ as Lord, we have to recognize that we are already on a counter cultural collision course. That's what we signed up for.

So we expect resistance and we're not surprised by opposition that we face, and we are to actually use that opposition and that resistance to drive us closer together, not to drive us apart, but to bring us together in partnership and in fellowship. And most certainly that should be happening within the Christian home.

So as Christian husbands, as Christian wives, let's try to endeavor to encourage one another and to do that daily. Sometimes we need to do that hour by hour, don't we? And as

Peter says, let us encourage each other as the fellow heirs of the grace of life, in a world that is trying to destroy marriage and tear it apart and is actually destroying many marriages as they continue to come apart.

And people are just saying, I'm not even going to choose marriage. I'm just going to cohabitate and do that serially throughout my life to avoid hurt and pain and all that. Listen, as Christians, let's rejoice in our marriages. Let's uphold God's goodness in marriage. Let's do this together as men and women, as husbands and wives.

Let's do this as families so that we become the champions of this first, most blessed institution that God created for our good and for his glory. He brings glory to himself through the Christian marriage, because this is a picture, a living picture of Christ in his relationship to his bride, the church.

So for this morning, we're addressing two roles. So there's a two-point outline: first fitting submission and then loving affection. Fitting submission and loving affection. And Paul sets for us a most chivalrous course and pattern.

So we start with ladies first. Number one: The fitting submission of the wife. Point number one: The fitting submission of the wife. "Wives be subject to your husband as is fitting in

the Lord," the addressee there, wives; the commanded instruction "be subject to your husband". That's followed by a reason for the command, "as is fitting in the Lord."

So the addressee, the command and the reason for the command, which giving a reason for the command is to inspire and motivate obedience to it. The address is to wives, that is, to adult married women. In other words, not all women are under the injunction here, which means that it is not the case that all women are to submit to all men. That's not the principle that Paul is giving here.

Paul is explicit about this in Ephesians 5:22. He adds an adjective there. "Submit to your own husbands" makes it very clear. So if you are a wife, if you chose to enter marriage by covenant before God, you've taken matrimonial vows that you are to honor before your God. You acknowledge his authority.

You acknowledge the authority of Christ. You acknowledge the authority that he has chosen to delegate to your own husband. If God takes your covenant seriously, and he does, then so should you. The command "be subject to your husbands" The verb there, be subject, is *hypotasso*. Subject, subordinate, even bring under firm control in the active voice. That's how it sounds.

There's an element there of compulsion. In the active voice, to make someone subject, to subordinate him, but it's not in the active voice, here in this verse. If it were, it would read husbands subject your wives or even if you want to address the wives, that would say, wives, in the passive voice, be subjected to your husbands. That is, let the outward force compel you and subject you. It's not what it says.

This is in the middle voice and there's a reflexive idea here that is wives are doing this of their own volition. Wives subject yourselves. This is to be self-imposed, voluntary submission, which is offered by wives to their own husbands as an act of devotion to the Lord.

This is the conscious decision of a wife, as *hypotasso* says, and it's quite literally, to line up under, to line up under the authority that God has placed over her. The command is present tense. Present tense deals not with time, but more aspect of the command. So it indicates an ongoing habit, a continual practice for the wife.

It's not only a conscious decision then, it's a daily decision. And it implies that wives are to have on their mind, they should have on their minds. Most Christian wives do have on

their minds, a daily consideration, a thought as to the will, the plans, ambitions, goals, the work of their husbands.

They are to take an intentional interest in what God has designed their husbands to do, called their husbands to do, sent their husbands to do. It's what really, women by their design, by God's good design, take delight in, rejoice in. So, wives, it's your responsibility and it's your daily duty, and by understanding the true sense of this wonderful word, *hypotasso,* you will come to understand how to obey the command and to do so cheerfully, with great delight, with great joy.

First of all, just to clear this up, submit does not mean obey. Submit and obey are not synonyms. It involves obedience, certainly, but mere obedience falls very far short of the mark. To obey is a different word. It's the word *hypakouo*, as in Colossians 3:20. Children obey your parents, that is, do what you're told, and if the kid doesn't understand, no matter, do it anyway.

It's the idea of the military; when I say jump, you say how high on the way up. What position do you want me in, sir, as you salute on the way up? Wives, you are not children. You're adults. It is not some unthinking obedience that God requires of

you. And that is not what any thinking husband wants. It's not what any family needs.

True submission is the thoughtful, well-reasoned practice of a biblical wisdom, a wisdom that is worked out in the context of a marital partnership, a wisdom of a thoughtful wisdom, well-reasoned wisdom, in the enjoyment of a loving fellowship of a partnership called marriage. Very specific partnership.

It is the basic fundamental building block of all society. It's the most intimate partnership. And to understand the concept here about this submission, let's take this vertical, which is what Paul does over in the parallel text, Ephesians 5:22 to 24. He says there, "Wives be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is head of the Church, He himself being the Savior of the body. But as the Church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything."

So if Christ merely wanted slavish, unthinking obedience from his church, why is it that Christ Jesus spent three years with his people, walking with them, living with them, talking with them, healing them, teaching them, loving them, and caring for them? Why bother if all he wants for his people is that we do whatever he says that had any understanding at all?

Why would he bother teaching us, instructing us, and explaining anything to us? Jesus told his disciples in John 15:15. "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master's doing."

So the fitting word for slaves. Colossians 3:22, "Slaves in all things obey your masters." *Hypakouo,* do what you're told, no arguments, no rebellion, just do it. Jesus says it's not like that with us, you and me, Lord-disciples, it's not like that. "No longer do I call you slaves, but I've called you friends."

Slaves do not know what their master is doing. Why? Because slaves, they were considered, at that time to be nothing more than living tools, animate tools, functional. They're used for functional purposes, not relational purposes. There's no need for a tool to have a brain and have a mind and think.

Jesus says, look, it's different with you, as you can see by what I have done, by how I've treated you. "All things that I've heard from my Father I've made known to you." John 15:15. Why does Jesus make known to his disciples all things he's heard from his Father? Because he wants not merely, *hypakouo*, do what you're told; although that's the end result, isn't it?

We want to do what we're told by God, because is there anyone wiser? Is there anyone more perfect? Is there anyone more

fit and appropriate to direct our lives and command our consciences? No. So we want to do what we're told. But he doesn't say that. He says I want *hypotasso*.

I want you to know the father's will and understand it like a friend of God. Yes, a slave of God; of course we're slaves of God. Paul calls himself a slave of Christ, but we're more than just slaves. We're friends. He wants us to know his father's will, to understand it, to see its wisdom, its goodness.

He wants, from the heart, for us to get on board with the program, get busy doing our part to make the father's will happen. What Jesus wants for us, for his disciples, for his church, his bride, is an act of submission, active submission, one that's thoughtful, conscious, intelligent, a well-reasoned participation in the outworking of the father's will that's revealed in Jesus Christ.

That's true biblical submission, and it is the most ennobling endeavor to be drawn up by God, to enter into his counsel, to know his mind, to understand him and then partner in doing his will.

And so here in Colossians 3:18, what Jesus wants for his adult female married disciples is this, that the way they serve the father, the way they follow his will, the way they serve

Christ in the work of the gospel, is first and foremost by submission, active submission, thoughtful, intelligent, conscientious, well-reasoned participation, in the outworking of the will, plans and ambitions, and goals of their own husbands.

Continuing with a vertical concept here in view, wives, in the same way that you have the blessed privileged duty to read and study and learn God's revealed will from Scripture, so that you can faithfully do what it says, you can learn to do the father's will, you take that same mindset and transfer it into your marriage on a horizontal level in your submission to your husband.

Yes, I know it's great when your husband is just a really good talker, just the best, most wonderful communicator, giving you clear, concise, well thought out, well-reasoned instructions for your daily work, helping you see all the good reasons for every point on his careful, considerate To Do List.

The perfect husband, whether he is that or whether he falls far short of that, which he will, your job is to figure him out. That's your duty. And as you take it up, you'll find it's your great joy as well. I'm always shocked when I hear a married woman, and even more so when she has children and she speaks with such an apparent disregard for her husband and his wishes.

Or she speaks with indifference, or worse, with some kind of arrogant flippancy toward him. Whether she says it out loud or she just kind of lives her life that way. It's, it's as if I don't care or he doesn't care what I do, what I spend, where I go, so why bother? Or I don't like doing this or that, so I'm not going to. Or I can't do that, which is really code for I won't do that.

That kind of impudence may earn uncomfortable smiles from other women in your friend's circle, but it's not cute and it's not funny. It's shameful. And so if that's you, stop being mouthy. Grow up and become a mature, dignified Christian woman who is worthy of imitation. Be a woman who is commendable in your actions, your behavior.

And if it's going to be in your actions, behavior, in your speech, it's going to go down into your heart and your thought life and your honoring attitude toward God, his authority, and toward your husband and his authority. I realize that there are exceptions to this, but my observation is that for the most part, the Christian husbands that I know and see, that man loves you. He cares for you. He's working hard to provide for you, and he will fight to protect you.

He puts his life on the line every day and in many ways so that you're comfortable, housed, well fed, well clothed. He sees that you can attend to things of beauty, whether it's personal beauty, but also beauty in the home and home making and funds your activities and your hobbies and how you spend on the kids. It's his heart's desire to provide and protect for you. So stop finding fault with your husband. Stop complaining about your situation and your circumstances. Stop ruing the lack of resources at your disposal.

Ask God to give you wisdom. Ask Christ to give you grace. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide and direct you according to the Word that he revealed and you use the intellect that God gave you, so that you read, study, and learn the husband that God gave you so that you know and understand him, because that's the gift that God gave you, not another. That's your main job.

Wives, even before that of being a mom to your children, becoming a mother does not take priority and precedent over being a wife to your husband. That's what came first. Being a wife, relationship to your husband is prior to the relationship with the children, which gives it the right of place. It's of higher priority. It's of greater importance.

I can already hear the protest in the heart. What about his responsibility to figure me out? You leave that between your husband and the Lord. If he's getting you wrong, I guarantee he will at times, but it may be less than you think. Then you make that a matter for prayer.

Don't barrage him with your complaints. Don't hen Peck him. Don't criticize or scold him. Instead, silence your mouth and open your heart in prayer. You pray for him even if he's doing wrong. Study 1 Peter 3:1 to 6, make that your practice so that any of your husbands are disobedient to the Word. It's a pretty big category.

Could be an occasional disobedience, a momentary disobedience, some sin, or it could be that man's not even a believer, so that if any are disobedient to the word, "he may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives." You make that you; "let your beauty be the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is precious in the sight of God."

And you pour yourself into prayer. You put your hope in God, and then as you pray for him in faith, in trusting in God's timing and his direction and his provision, you just watch to see what God does with your husband. I am, as imperfect as I am,

but in my growth, my sanctification, I am the product of my wife's prayers for me.

She's seen plenty of flaws over the years. She's made her errors, obviously both of us have. But her greatest triumph is in how she's prayed for me and how she's made me useful to you. Pray, women, pray. Your main job, your assigned role, is to be the most fitting helper to him.

So what the word helpmeet means, by the way, a meet or fit, fitting helper, partner, friend, lover, companion, that's your role and it's a joyful privilege, brings us to the reason for the command.

We've seen the addressee, all you wives, adult married women, the command subject yourselves to your husbands, which is to line up under their authority and to do so intentionally, consciously, thoughtfully, intelligently with biblical wisdom and speak into their lives and speak into their decisions. Help them. What's the reason? Paul puts it simply this way, as is fitting in the Lord: Fitting.

Principle of fittingness here refers to what's suitable, what is right, appropriate, proper. Paul has boiled this down here for brevity, but knowing that the Colossians would soon read the Ephesian letter, as for Colossians 4:16, so what he

summarizes here as being fitting in the Lord, he actually expanded in Ephesians 5:23.

What makes wifely submission to husband something fitting? Paul says, "Because Christ also is the head of the church." He himself being savior of the body, and you are submissive to him, right? In other words, we as Christians, we submit willingly, eagerly, cheerfully to Christ because we recognize his headship.

We understand and acknowledge his Lordship, since it was he, after all, and not we ourselves, who has saved us. And how did he do that? He died for us on a cross. It is to that one, to that one who demonstrated such great love for us that we owe absolutely everything and the least of which, that we can give is our joyful submission, our best service, our loyal devotion.

So when that one who is the savior of the body, when your savior speaks tenderly to you, wives saying, listen, wife, I want you to practice your submission to me in your own homes. I want you to submit yourself to your own husband. Is that not a most gracious, most pleasant command? He lets you submit in the context of a romantic partnership, a friendship.

Jesus isolates your submission to himself, giving you a clear line of sight, focusing you, making it exceedingly easy for you to please him in this. And Paul sets the priority for

service to Christ, saying, you wives, you go home and "you be subject to your own husbands," Ephesians 5:22, "as to the Lord."

So if a wife does not submit to her husband, she doesn't submit to her Lord either. If a wife does not submit well to her husband and doesn't grow in submission to her husband, well, she's not submitting well to the Lord either, and she's not growing in her submission to him either. No submission or sloppy submission or lazy submission or mediocre submission; the one affects the other. They're inextricably linked.

We can illustrate with the language of 1 John 4:20 and the principle that's there. The woman who doesn't submit to her husband, whom she has seen, cannot submit to her God, whom she has not seen. Submission to God, submission to the husband, the two inform one another, strengthen one another, reinforce each other, but the focus for the wife is with her husband, for it is most fitting in the Lord.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:3, "I want you to understand Christ is the head of every man, the man is the head of the woman," which in the context refers to the husband's authority over his wife, "and God is the head of Christ." So it's fitting, most becoming for a Christian wife to submit to the authority of her husband, and not merely because she's doing it before a

watching world, because her marriage is a testimony of Christ in his relationship with the church.

It's not merely about that, but most immediately and most importantly, her testimony is to her watching children, to her daughters who will one day be married to husbands. How do you want them to treat their husbands? Or to her sons who are men in training, and they're watching to see how Mom treats Dad, how she speaks to Dad, how she speaks about Dad, when he's not around. How she withholds rolling her eyes at Dad, as she refuses to say any unkind word about Dad. It’s so important.

We're investing in the next generation. A wife's submission provides a daily example to others, even beyond the marital relationship, and it's so instructive on the vertical level, as well; as others, learn from a wife's godly example how submission works, how she uses her time, talents, gifts, intellect, time, energy to learn about the husband that God gave her and then to advance his goals and his aims and realize his ambitions, hopes, dreams, make him the best husband, the best worker, the best man, called to whatever God's called him to, that she can in the world.

She just wants to benefit and bless him, take her place at his side with the encouragement and practical help that she is

designed by God to give and provide with an intelligent, thoughtful, conscientious submission. Way more that can be said about that, but we need to turn our attention to husbands. And by the way, I'll just add that, you know, it's impossible in the time we have, half an hour that I've gone on wives and I'm going to go another half hour on husbands.

But it's impossible in this kind of a time and this kind of a setting to cover all the contingencies and all the different issues. I've got to speak in generalities that speak to most situations, most, you know, generalities about women, generalities about men. I've got to speak that way. And that is the benefit and the blessing of proclaimed preaching, proclaimed word.

It's actually the strength of proclamation. Is it kind of just levels everything, right? And that's why there are times like what we're going to do tonight, where Q&A's are appropriate to interact with your pastor, with your elders, to ask various issues that come to your mind and different things that were addressed. Or when something troubles the heart to say, well, but then in my situation, how do I work this out? Totally appropriate.

We want to satisfy that need tonight if that will serve you well. So second, number two, point number two: the loving affection of the husband, the loving affection of the husband. We look at the text again, and this is Colossians 3:19. "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them."

Anyone who's familiar with the parallel over in Ephesians 5:25 and following, you're probably thinking, man, that is way too brief. And the wives are thinking Amen, is way too brief. Listen, on the other hand, there's a great brilliance here, knowing what men are like, giving us brief instructions that are simple, concise and easy to remember. That's not all bad.

In fact, make your husband a T-shirt; just put Colossians 3:19 on it. Let him go to work like that. But again, Paul knows that this Colossian letter is going to be shared with the church in Laodicea. The church, the letter that's coming to Laodicea, which is probably Ephesians, it's going to come through Laodicea to come to them.

So no husband in the Colossian congregation or in the whole Lycus Valley is going to miss out on the fuller instruction that Paul provides in Ephesians 5. He knows that. And we have a completed Canon in front of us. So we can flip a few pages back

and go read the fuller instruction as well. And I encourage you to do that.

But we see in what verse 18 and verse 19 have in common, we notice both of them identify an addressee, wives and then husbands, respectively. Both issue a command, but Paul does not give husbands a reason to obey as he did to the wives. Instead, he gives them a second command, a prohibition. And we could joke around and say it's because husbands are more hard-hearted than women, but that's not the reason.

It has to do with Christ's tenderness to those who are under authority. He gives them reasons to obey. He encourages them. Christ, as I read from 1 Corinthians 11:3, he's under the authority of his father. You know what his father did in sending him out into the world? Revealed his entire mind to him.

So he's lived this out. In his submission to his father, he's lived out knowing the father's will, having reasons to obey. It's encouraged his obedience. He passes the same pattern on to the people under obedience in Colossians 3:18 to 4:1. So it's instructive, husbands to you, how the Lord, her Lord and your Lord, how he speaks so tenderly to your wife.

The Lord sees fit to induce your wife to obedience, which means he's got her burden in mind. He's sympathetic to what she

faces in submitting to a fallible man like you, and that's no slight on you. We are fallible. We make mistakes, we get things wrong, we don't see things clearly. We're all in stages of growth. I hope I'm a better husband than I was 30 years ago.

So if he wants to make it easier for her to submit to you, you need to get on his wavelength and in your leadership, you need to make it as easy as you can for her to submit to you and follow you trust you. Husbands, you've got some help in this because you see the pattern set before you about how the Lord speaks to your wife.

Notice first, he speaks to your wife. He uses words. He didn't grunt at her. He didn't motion, he didn't assume. Gives her words to consider. If you fancy yourself the strong, silent type, John Wayne, stop it. Stop it. Don't learn about manhood from movies.

If the Lord speaks to her and he is the perfect man, you follow his example and you engage your wife in conversation. That is her joy and right as a wife with you is to have a relational intimacy with you. You give it to her. Notice that when the Lord instructs her, he goes further to give her the reason why. And I realize that in the flow of life that's not always practical.

But when you recognize what the Lord is commanding her to do, that is to practice an intelligent and wise and informed submission to your will, your plans, your ambitions, your desires, you need to help her out by bringing her into your thinking and how do you do that, if you do not talk to her or if you talk very little with each other?

If you're not intentional about planning times to talk with each other? Husbands, don't be insecure in your leadership. Expose what you think by talking about it, and let your wife, she is, after all, God's gift to you, Proverbs 18:22, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord." Do we believe that? Then let your wife into your mind. Let her ask you questions, let her interact with you, give you input, test your thoughts, test your plans with her inquisitiveness, which is natural to her and native to her. That's a good tool.

God put her there to help you. It's her desire to be helpful to you. She's a fitting, a meet helper for you. Do not be a fool by shutting her down. Don't be lazy or insecure, refusing to try, retreating into silence, running off to work, getting involved in other things, otherwise not engaging with her and more to the point, don't you dare disobey the Lord who

delegated his authority to you, because you're assigned role in this marriage covenant to love your wife.

And to love your wife, it means it's the end of you. It is a self-sacrificing love that God demands in Christ to you husbands now to pursue obedience to a role. We got to talk about what love is, got to define the term, and then see how the second command here in Colossians 3:19. This prohibition expands on how we understand the first.

So when he says, love your wives, how does he define the word love? Does he have an American definition? No, he does not. I'll answer that for you; sharply, no! There are four Greek words for love, which I'll just mention only for the sake of contrast. There's this word *agape*. *Agapao* is the verb. *Agapao* is the word here.

Another word, second word, is *philia*. *Phileo* is the word you've heard. Hear that in Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love, *Philia* and adelphos. *Philia* is friendship love, and the Greeks actually saw *philia* and *phileo,* as the most virtuous of all loves. And we can at times see in the Bible where *agape* and *philia*, those two nouns are kind of synonymous. We can see that in Scripture at times.

Eros is another word for love, which is speaking of romantic love or sensual desire. We get the word erotic from that word. And then there's the word *storge*. *Storge* refers to natural affection. It's kind of exemplified in parental love, or a mother's love for her infant child.

Of all of these four words, the Greeks thought very little of that first word, the agape kind of love. They kind of viewed that as this idealistic, pie in the sky, unrealistic ambition and aim. And so it kind of fell into disuse.

The word *agape* had very little purchase in Greek literature, very little grip on the cultural imagination. That is, until Christ came, until Christ was proclaimed, until it was demonstrated in the proclamation of the gospel, the unconditional love of God in Christ, when he sent his Son to die on the cross as a substitute for our sins. Well, now that's something different.

This is the word that the Christians then took and injected with Christian meaning and used that to capture the imagination of the Greeks as they preach the gospel to them and communicate the concept of God's unconditional love. Christ's sacrificial love to the point of death, a love that was not based on any merit or lack of merit in the object of his love, and the love

was directed always for the good of the object receiving the love.

This *agape* love, unlike all the other loves, isn't determined by attraction, internal or external, but by a decision. It's why when you hear people who are getting divorced and they say, well, we fell out of love with each other. Okay, whatever you fell into wasn't true *agape* Christian love. You fell into something else. No surprise you're falling out of it again, if it's subject only to your feelings and emotions, that rise and fall. That's not *agape* love. That's not the love that holds a marriage together.

Love is a decision of a will. It's a decision for the glory of God to do what is best and what is good for the object or recipient of that love. Harold Honer did a word study in the verb *agapao*, which is the verbal cognate for the noun *agape*. But he says, "That in the classical period," that's, you know, the 500 years of Greek before Christ, "*agapao* had the idea of showing or treating with affection, and it was a free, uncoerced, unselfish choice to do so. The subject chooses to love its object and to keep doing so as a conscious act of concern, and to do so no matter what."

So while those other loves like *eros* and *philia*, they draw men and women into marriage. They're useful because of physical or relational attraction. The marriage covenant itself is an expression of commitment. The marriage covenant is a decision of individual free choice, a covenant sealed by vows, taking a marital oath before God.

So the covenant of marriage, a commitment to *agape* love, vowing "to have and to hold, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, and to love and cherish till death do they part," and may God help them. That's how they vow to each other. And this gets real, when after the wedding and after the honeymoon, things get worse and not better.

When tested by getting poorer not richer, when there's more sickness than health, when circumstances get harder and not easier. These are times when love is put to the test, when the decision to love the other must not draw from personal reserves. It can't depend on or look to any human resource that is left to seek the help of God and God alone, and to make it the hourly, daily withdrawal from that infinite supply of the heavenly treasury where, there alone is found the love of God.

The love that binds and unites the husband to the wife and the wife to the husband is the duty-bound love commanded by God

that we husbands show to our wives and that comes not from ourselves, it's not based on attraction or personal interest, that can only come from the only source of such a love, God alone. God alone is the source of *agape* love, since he himself is that love.

He demonstrated that love for us not when we were attractive, but why we were yet sinners, when we were the most unattractive, when we were wretched and hideous in our sin, when we were not on his side, but we were enemies of his. We were waging a hostile war against him and hating him with all of our being, that's when he loved us, that's when God sent his own son to die for us.

It was a free choice of his will, uncoerced and unselfish, because it was a decree from before time began. Its love granted to us by his grace for our ultimate good. It's a corrective love, an instructive love, a confronting love, that didn't leave us in our sins, but actually exposed them, brought them to the surface so we could deal with them honestly, righteously before him.

It's a kind of love that really everyone longs for, because we know in our hearts, we have bad in us. We have sin in us, and were all that exposed to the watching world, people

would flee in horror at what they see. But God, who sees all things and on his omniscient gaze, he searches us and knows us and loves us still. That's the love that we long for, that we need most.

And that's the love that husbands are to show to their wives; not on their best day, on date night when she's all dolled up, it's what we show to our wives at their very worst moments, moments when she'd prefer no one sees that and no one knows that, it's a covering love. It's kind of love every wife longs for from her husband.

And apart from God, even a husband can't give this kind of love on his own. He has to go to God, but a wife longs for it so much. It's what the Shulamite woman expresses to Solomon. The Shulamite woman says to Solomon, her bridegroom, "Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm." In other words, cherish me. Keep me close to you. Make me precious to you.

More, those seals were for financial transactions. Make me more precious to you than your financial transactions, than your money, than your authority, than your power, than your influence. And then, very insightfully, she identifies the only kind of love that's going to bind them together for life and keep her close to him as being powerful, eternally mortal,

spiritual, she says. "For love is as strong as death and jealousy as severe as sheol."

In other words, it's powerful, she says, its, "its flashes" are flashes of fire, the very flame of Yah," shortened version of Yahweh. In other words, that love is eternal. It's powerful, it's eternal, she says, "Many waters can't quench love, nor will rivers overflow it." It's immortal, this love, indestructible.

"If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, he'd be utterly despised." That is to say, you can't buy this love. You can't buy people off for not giving this love. This love is immaterial and spiritual in nature.

Husbands, you're charged to love like that. You're charged with the highest, most holy responsibility, which is the blessed duty of loving your wife with the unconditional love of God. You are to be the conduit of God's love, his divine love to come through you, the channel to this precious creature who is now your wife.

Loving your wife does not mean giving her whatever she wants, though that's a good instinct, is to always cultivate a generous spirit, a giving instinct for her. You should have it in your heart to never want to say no to your wife, but always be able to say yes, yes, yes.

Loving your wife doesn't mean you never contradict her, never correct her. In fact, that's not love, that's self-centeredness. She needs your tender correction, she needs your kind instruction, needs your loving direction, but it's got to be gentle and tender.

If you want to know how to love your wife, look to the Scripture and see how God loves us. See how God has loved you. Specifically, look to Christ and see his loving kindness and study it. Learn to imitate it. Think again about yourself. Think about his patient forbearance with you, you knucklehead. Think about how forgiving he is with you.

Husbands, if you love your wives as an act of your will, based on what's best for her, not what's best or easiest for you, not what avoids upsetting her? What avoids creating more work for you? You make it easier for her to submit to you. Trust your intentions, follow your leadership.

You want to know how such love communicates most clearly to a woman, to the heart of a woman, it's that you can correct her and love her, care for her, provide for her, protect her and you never get mad at her. You never get upset at her. You never raise your voice at her. In Paul's words, "Husbands love your

wives and do not be embittered against her." What's he addressing in this prohibition?

How does this second command augment the first? Well, it's instructive on how this commitment to love our wives is practiced. It's practiced in a tender affection toward her, not an embitterment. It's the opposite of embitterment. The verb here is *pikraino. Pikros* is literally, kind of sounds that way. Bitter, get it out of my mouth.

Pikros refers to making water bitter, like as in poisonous, as to be undrinkable. And when a bitter thing does enter into the stomach, that stomach turns sour, painful. So *pikraino*, a very vivid word, and it's supposed to evoke a visceral feeling about this relational embitterment that we feel when we're embittered or angry or impatient. We feel it kind of in the gut, don't we? Paul says, that's a good warning sign that you may be teetering on the brink of resentment or anger.

Now, why would any husband who freely, knowingly, without any coercion, walked to the altar and took vows before God to love this beautiful creature, his wife, all dressed in white? Why would he ever have reason to be embittered toward his wife?

What makes this prohibition necessary? I have three suggestions. First, in our fallen condition, differences between men and women can be difficult to appreciate or rejoice in. We just, we have fallen habits of thinking, fallen habits of feeling, fallen, fallen habits of reaction, that we kind of grew up with, that we learned. But they become opportunities for bitterness, if we're not watchful.

We got to mortify those things in us, we've got to practice Colossians 3:1 through 17, really, and then use that sanctified nature to love our wives and not be embittered against her. It's no secret that women in general are more emotionally volatile than men, more relationally sensitive than men, more nurturing. They tend, instinctively, to feelings of compassion for the underdog.

They don't appreciate sometimes the risk-taking competitive nature of men, but they can be a check on male aggressiveness, that nature of theirs, a check on their risk-taking initiative, a check on their competitiveness. And when husbands resent this caution from their wives and not see it as a blessing, but a hindrance, they might be missing out on and appreciating this complimentary gift that God has given to them in their wives.

We could see this illustrated poignantly in the cautionary wisdom that Abigail used to influence this impetuous, impulsive, indignant King David. When his men were offended, when his offers of protection to Nabal were rejected and he was actually scorned in return. David was marching to take that man's head off and destroy his whole family, but because of Abigail, David did not take his own personal vengeance out on Nabal. Because of her, he kept his conscience clear before God, and he was further elevated in the eyes of his men for listening to her wisdom.

But men and women, husbands and wives, when they tend toward sinful habits of thinking, they're at odds with each other, we've got to mortify those things. Second, why do men become embittered? Or can they be tempted toward that? Because in our natural weakness, exacerbated by effects of the fall on the body, husbands are not always patient with female fragility, not always kind and understanding with their physical weakness.

This is what Peter tells husbands in 1 Peter 3:7. He says, "Live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she's a woman." Weaker vessel there, is talking about the physical and emotional constitution of a woman, all the hormonal changes that affect the body of a woman from when

she's a young girl, on to the end, in menstruation, gestation, childbirth, later in life and during menopause.

These things are really radically changing in a woman. They perplex men. Seems like the woman that you knew last week isn't the same one this week. And then she, something else took her place the next week. And it's like, I understand what that whole multiple personality disorder thing they talked about in the 90s.

You know what? She didn't like it either. She didn't like the instability and changes and she didn't quite understand it herself. She needs you to be understanding and kind with her gentle, tender. So husbands, you're to, Peter says, "Live with your wives in an understanding way." Know them. Would it hurt you to read an article describing medical things, changes.

You'd devour sports stuff. Take just, take a few minutes, let her put a good article in your hands and know your wife well enough to get what's going on with her physically. Patient to listen to what may be troubling her emotionally, may be upsetting her relationally.

And you know the old adage? You know when she starts talking, that's not a signal for you to fix something. It's often a signal for you just to sit, listen. You can even take

notes and maybe pray. Add that to your prayer list and if she says to you, why are you being so quiet, why don't you help me, say, oh, oh, this is a fix it conversation. I'm all in!

Then men, you listen to her, pray with her, pray for her, because God can help her in her soul in ways that you cannot; in ways you were never meant to satisfy her and help her. Her weaker constitution is really for your sake. It's a ministry to you to provoke your growth in tenderness and compassion, kindness and affection. It's meant to strengthen your prayer life, force you to grow in patience, understanding, gentleness, tenderness.

All these challenges can turn into real strengths for us, can't they? It's a third suggestion I have about why men might become embittered against their wives. It's in close connection to the previous two, but husbands can tend to under appreciate the power of temptations that their wives face. They themselves living in the world and they face temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil. All kinds of pressures coming on all of us, but women in particular and especially today. We've been talking about that.

Husbands and wives, parents, you are, I would say, sinning if you have no idea what your kids are consuming in social media

and entertainment and if you just hand them a cell phone and an Internet connected phone or an Internet connected game box or whatever the tool is these days; you are negligent in your leadership and in your parenting, if you have no idea what's going on, because there are people out there prowling after your kids to disciple them and to take them away from you and turn them against you.

In a similar way, wives can be under the influence of things outside of your home. They come into your home. They don't have to come through the front door. You standing there with a gun doesn't help, but she's in the bedroom on her cell phone. You need to know what's influencing your family, husbands; especially in these days of social media and viewing online entertainment.

These portable electronic devices can divide marriages and intrude into bedrooms and separate husbands and wives with their individual viewing preferences. Remember, you need to love your wife, not worry about who wins the ballgame. Far more important is that you love her by being attentive to what's influencing her, thoughtful about what she's thinking about, watchful about what may be tempting her and troubling her.

I'm not suggesting you snoop around and spy on her. No need for that. You want to know what she's into, just ask her. A Christian wife will tell you. In fact, she's eager to talk, happy to have a conversation with you, to have a loving, interested husband looking out for her. Good.

Just as married men, ignored by their wives can become vulnerable to temptations, married women also in other ways. When their husbands ignore them or are ignorant, or are indifferent or aren't vigilant or attentive, wives can become vulnerable to temptations too. Relational influences, sins of the tongue, gossip, slander, being too nice, valuing superficial harmony and pleasant feelings over confronting and dealing with sins and with problems. Especially so, because women tend to be more relational than men, as a general principle, general rule, they can sometimes overlook what they ought not to overlook in other people.

Read an article recently written by a young woman who describes herself this way. She says, "anyone in my life can tell you I'm a highly disagreeable 24-year-old. I'm ashamed to say it, and I'm actively working on my sass and argumentativeness, but it's the truth and I'm quite conservative."

She writes candidly about herself and about the issues that women face and feminine things and all that. She speaks rather humorously about female tendencies and female problems, and she describes men, quote, "as less censorious and more willing to let the other side speak than women." And then she continues with this. "None of this means women are bad. We simply have higher empathy, higher threat sensitivity, preference for social harmony over open confrontation, which sounds at odds with my earlier confession. Online, we screech. In person we smile. We're a confusing sex.

"We keep small circles of cohesion and tolerate little deviation. Step out of line or offend one of us and we'll nurse a grudge into the next decade. Our new found enemy may never know it, or at the very least we won't express our hostility to her face. Instead, we serve passive aggressive kindness and then complain to our family's friends and boyfriends and the sisters."

By that she means her friends. "And the sisters nod along, adopting a shiny new disdain for your fresh enemy who is now their foe to. And the boyfriend offers advice. Why don't you just tell her how you feel? To which you answer no, no, I could

never do that. I'll just pretend everything is fine." And then she ends with this, "It's not fine."

Husbands, if this 24-year-old was your wife, you need to recognize that you're not in her life to be one of the sisters. You're not in her life to be the boyfriend. As the husband, you're charged by God to lovingly confront and correct these tendencies. Address her hard attitudes, her patterns of speech, her behavior. You need to help her.

These days and in this, as we've talked about this highly feminized cultural milieu, the pressure is against anyone noticing feminine forms of sin. No one, it seems, and especially men, especially husbands, it seems, are allowed to notice. Or if they notice, they're not permitted to say anything. We're expected to pretend that all is well, even when we know full well all is not well and that our wives and our daughters are misbehaving.

Through the years of ministry, every now and again I've seen small uprisings in churches here and elsewhere, as groups of immature women find each other, gossip together, tear down male leadership, male leadership in the church, in the home and then they aim their husbands, who are usually the passive type.

They aim their husbands at the elders to pass along the message that you guys are oppressive and overbearing in your leadership and after much prayer, we're leaving to go find another church. In every case, it's a domineering wife who's got a collar on her husband. She's not been well led by her husband. He's been passive, ignorant, deeply unloving in ignoring his wife's sins.

She's being led around by her emotions, nursing her offenses, stirred into a frenzy by likeminded friends, and she is not at peace in her soul. Wives, you don't want to remain in the same sass and argumentativeness as you were when you're in the early 20s. You don't want to have the same grudge nursing petty passive aggressiveness admitted to by that author, do you? Of course you don't.

By the way, that 24-year-old and the author in the article, she don't want to either. She's conservative in her politics. She's not Christian. Husbands, they don't need girlfriends to affirm them, stroke their egos, tell them they're right. They don't need boyfriends who merely suggest things to them.

Our wives need godly husbands, men who honor their covenant of marriage, men who take their God-given duty of loving affection seriously. Husbands are to love their wives, doing and

speaking what is to their ultimate good, and to do with a patient and tender and kind and gentle manner, and with a friendly partnering demeanor, always prayerful, ever ready to help lift burdens for their wife.

So, Christian wives, will you be receptive to this love? Can you receive your husband's loving correction? Can you get help from a man, even a fallible man, but a man who's willing to love you like that? If the answer is yes, then make it easy on your husbands. Encourage them to do what God's called them to do. Not letting things go. Not letting you ask like an immature teenage girl.

Husbands, it's not your responsibility to make your wife obey to a coercer, cajoler, manipulator. Just like any other human relationship, when someone sins against us, we're not allowed to sin in return. We're not even allowed to sin in our hearts, our thoughts, our attitudes, certainly not in our speech. Each of us is responsible to walk righteously before God and conduct ourselves in a manner well pleasing to God.

On the other hand, it doesn't mean, a wife and it doesn't mean, a husband, that you're not allowed to bring it up when your spouse is being disobedient to the Lord. Female submission doesn't overlook male sin, and male love toward their wives

doesn't mean we overlook female sin either. It's as it is in any other human relationship when someone sins.

To let sin go is unloving. Indifference is hatred. I'll caution you though, be very careful, especially in a marriage relationship where things are so intimate and so tender. Sins committed in the context of marriage are felt very intimately and personally and can hurt and cut more deeply than in any other relationship. And that means our motive to help our spouse to see and correct a sin. We need to realize it can be fraught with self-interest, can't it?

I didn't say it always is fraught with self-interest or filled with self-interest, just that it can be, doesn't need to be. So how you handle that sin with your spouse is the make or break issue. So how do you handle it? How do you communicate? How do you convey interest in the other? That is a non self-interested concern for the good of your spouse.

Wife when confronting your husband before the Lord, is it coming from a heart of wifely submission, as is fitting in the Lord? Or is it coming from wifely rebellion and hurt and complaint? Be very careful how you handle yourself, how you deal with your heart.

Husband when you confront your wife before the Lord is it coming from a heart of love or impatient irritation rooted in self-centeredness, because you just want to watch the game. Be careful how you speak. See to it that you're not only loving, but you're affectionate too.

And then do not become embittered, angry or impatient with your wife. Those things hurt, cut deep, and last a long, long time. She's intuitively wired to detect in your voice, your looks, your body posture, everything, if you are at all impatient with her, irritated with her, that's a gift to you. If you'll receive it that way, to allow yourself to be corrected by this loving wife that God has given you.

Wives, show fitting submission to your husbands, and you husbands, show loving affection to your wives. And by God's grace, we'll partner together in this great gift of Christian marriage in loving fellowship for his glory. Let's pray.

Our Father, we love you so much, and we see all that has been revealed and all that we've learned as such a gracious gift from you. And we ask Father that you would grant us, command what you will, but give what you command. Just provide for us. Help us to grow and learn and never to be intimidated by the by the great high Holy commands that you give us.

Sometimes when we face up to these commands and realize what you're asking us to do and learn, we could be intimidated by it. It feels like we're being commanded to climb Mount Everest without arms or legs. And really, in a human sense, that's what all your commands are, because to obey from the heart, to do your will the way you require, it depends on no human strength. We put faith in you, and you provide for what you command.

We pray you encourage us and strengthen us and help us to look at our spouses in a whole different way as a result of hearing what you've taught us this morning from Colossians 3:18 and 3:19. Encourage our hearts, strengthen us, and help us to rejoice in God honoring marriages. For your glory, we pray. Amen.