

Christ In The Home – Husbands

Colossians 3:19

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I'm going to read Colossians 3:19. I want you to follow with me. Paul says, "Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them."

When Jesus comes into a person's heart, the Bible says, "Old things pass away; behold all things become new." Paul, in Colossians 3, has been exhorting us to put off the old life and to put on the new life. He used the metaphor of taking off an old, soiled garment and of putting on a new garment. So we take off the old clothes, and we put on new clothes; the grave clothes of the old life, and we put on the grace clothes of the new life.

When Jesus comes into our hearts and changes our lives, He also wants to come into our homes and change our families. There are four things I touched on last time. As a way of reminder, I want to bring up again what Christ brings into our marriages and into our homes.

First of all, He brings His presence. In eight verses, we have five times that Paul mentions the Lord. From verse 18-21, we have about five references to the Lord. When you become a Christian, your marriage now has the Lord in the center of it. The Bible says, "A threefold cord is not easily broken." So it's not just the husband and the wife, it's Jesus Christ in the middle of that relationship. He brings His presence.

Secondly, He brings a new pattern into our marriages. The Bible says that "As the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." And then husbands are to "love their wives as Christ also loved the church." His presence and His pattern. As the church submits to Christ, so the wife does to her husband, and as Christ loved the church, so husbands love their wives.

Thirdly, He brings His purpose into our marriage. I want you to notice it in Colossians 3:17. "And whatever you do in word or deed..."—that covers everything—"...do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by Him." What does it mean to do everything "in the name of the Lord Jesus"? It means that we want to glorify Jesus in everything we do. I know that's a challenge, but that's the goal. That's the purpose. Our purpose is that God be glorified in our lives and in our marriages. Actually, verse 17 is worked out in wives, husbands, children, parents, servants and masters. Everything we do and say is to be done and said in the name and for the glory of the Lord Jesus.

He brings His presence, His pattern, His purpose and fourthly, He bring His power. Ephesians 5:18 commands us, "Do not be drunk with wine wherein is excess..."—or "debauchery"—"...but be filled with the Holy Spirit." We cannot be what God wants us to be in our marriages unless we are filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

So Paul gives us God's word to wives, husbands, children and parents, but before we break

down verse 19 to the husbands, I want you to note two foundational things about this entire passage on relationships.

Number one, the emphasis on the whole passage is on duties and not rights. What do we hear in our culture today? We hear everyone clamoring for rights. We have women's rights, children's rights, gay rights, religious rights. We have all these rights, and everyone wants their rights. Why not a movement for duties? Why not be responsible and do what we're supposed to be doing? Every one of us has a duty. The focus on the passage is on the wife's duty, the husband's duty, the children's duty, the parent's duty, the servant's duty and the master's duty.

The second thing I'd like to say is that the duties are shown to be reciprocal. If a wife is to submit, the husband is to love his wife. If children are to obey their parents, then parents are not to provoke their children to anger but are to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. If the servant is to obey the master, then the master is to give the servant that which is right and just and equal and fair. So all of these relationships focus on duties, but they are reciprocal.

Now we come to verse 19, God's word to the husbands. "Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them." The command to love your wife is not unique. It's all through the New Testament. You find it in many books of the New Testament. But what is unique to Paul's words here is, "Be not bitter against them." There are two commands given. The first is positive: "Husbands, love your wives." The second in verse 19 is negative: "Be not bitter against them." I want to spend most of my time on the first command, the positive command of "Husbands, love your wives."

Notice, first of all, that this directive is radically elevating. What I mean by that is that in the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day, women were chattels. They were just things. A husband would have a wife or wives, and he would have cows, sheep and a house. They would all just be possessions. Even in the Jewish culture, all of the responsibility would lie with the wife, and all of the privileges would lie with the husband. Under the Jewish law, the wife had no right of divorce. The husband could divorce his wife for any reason he wanted to. She was to be seen but not heard. She was put in subjection.

In the Greco-Roman culture, it was no better than in the Jewish culture. Women would live in their own apartments. They wouldn't actually eat with the men. A man could have a harem and a concubine. He could do whatever he wanted with other women, but the wife was to stay chaste and pure. She had no right of divorce. She had no say. She couldn't even go to the market by herself; she had to be accompanied by a man. Women lived in subjection. We see this in parts of the world today where Christianity has not had an influence. The liberation of women in the western world is due to Christianity and the influence that Christ brings.

So my point is that Christianity elevates and liberates women. A lot of the extreme women's liberation movement today is focusing on their rights but not their responsibilities. But we see the blurring of gender roles; we have a gender-neutral influence in our culture today where we

want to deny that women are women and men are men. We've forsaken God's design for marriage, and we're reaping in our culture the chaos and confusion and the hatred and the anger that we've sown. If you sow to the flesh, the flesh will reap corruption. We have no fixed point. We've denied God and His Word; we have nothing to really fix ourselves to as being true or false.

I wanted to point out that this is a radically elevating statement. When those early Christians in Colosse, coming out of the Greco-Roman world, opened Paul's letter and read, "Husbands, love your wives," it would have blown them away. This is radical, the idea that I'm to actually love my wife.

Secondly, I would point out, based on verse 19, that this directive in the Greek is in what's called the "present active imperative." It means that husbands should love their wives in all times and in all situations. You say, "Wait a minute, pastor. That was written before my wife was born. I don't think you really want to say that." Yes, I do. Number one, it's a command. An imperative is a command, and in the Greek language, this is a command, and it's in the present tense. So it is to be an ongoing, continual love. So it's not seasonal, it's not to be only when she's lovely, it's to be ongoing, continually loving your wife.

This indicates a very important thing. Love is not just an emotion or feeling. If God can command husbands to love their wives, guess what? You can do it. God would never command you to do something you can't do. You say, "Well, I don't feel anything for her." It doesn't say you are to "feel" love for your wife. Love is not a feeling, especially this word for love, which I'll get to in a minute. If God can command us to love our wives, then He knows we can do it, but we can only do it with His help.

I like Warren Wiersbe's explanation. He said, "Love is not a passing emotion. Love is a continual devotion." Love is not a feeling. Love is a decision of the will. If you don't get anything else I say, men, get this: You can make a conscious decision to love your wife. What if she's unlovely? You still decide to love her.

This kind of love that is talked about here is a love that seeks the highest good of the object loved. It's not a love that wants its own needs met or its own feelings affirmed. It's a love that wants to give and give and give. All it has in mind is what is best for the one who is loved and for the glory of God. It's not a passing emotion. It's a continual devotion. When you say your vows and you pledge your love in marriage before God and man, you are committing to love that woman "in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, till death do you part." Did you hear those words? You say, "Well, those words weren't in my vows, so I don't care." I've heard some of the mushiest, silliest vows in weddings: "As long as we both shall love." And then a month later, they fall out of love and they get a divorce. No; "as long as you both shall live." "Till death do you part." Or until the rapture and the Lord takes you home to be with Him in heaven.

Let me mention a third thing about verse 19, and this is important. The Greek word "love" is "agape" or "agapao." "Agape" is a variation of agapao because of the tense that is used. It

means an ongoing, continual love of agape. You ask, “Well, what do you mean by ‘agape’?” In the English language, we only have one word for love. We don’t have multiple words for love. We’ll say, “I love to go to the beach” or “I love to hike in the mountains” or “I love to ride a mountain bike” or “I love to go fishing” or “I love to golf.” I would say, “I love peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.”

You know what I do once a year? Once a year I make a big, honkin’, juicy, gnarly peanut butter and jelly sandwich. It’s so awesome. I love it. You know, the ones that just drip, and you have to keep licking them on the sides. You take a big bite, and they’re so thick you can’t open your mouth for twenty minutes. I just love a good peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I can’t eat them very often, because they give me the shakes and I start to freak out. Too much jelly. But I love peanut butter and jelly, and I love my wife. Obviously, my love for my wife is to be a different kind of love than my love for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

In the Greek, there are at least four words for “love” or translated “love.” I want to share them with you. The first is “eros.” We get our word “erotic” from that. That is the love that only wants its own needs met, and that would be the love in the sexual realm or the sensual realm or the physical realm. That word does not appear in the New Testament, by the way.

Then there is the word “storge,” which is the word for family love. You love your brothers and sisters and your mom and your dad.

Then there’s the word “phileo.” We get our word Philadelphia from it. It means a “brotherly love,” a friendship love, actually. “I like to play tennis and you like to play tennis, so I love you and let’s go play tennis together.” It’s kind of a commonness that we hold things together; we share things together.

The fourth kind of love is the word “agape” that we have translated here in Colossians 3:19. “Husbands, agape your wives.” Agape love was popularized because of Christianity. People looked at Christians and said, “Behold how they agape.” They really loved one another. Sacrificially. Denying. Giving. It is a love that comes from God, and it wants to give and give and give. You’re all familiar with John 3:16, which says, “For God so loved...”—it’s the Greek word “agape”—“...the world that He gave...”—there’s the description of agape—“...His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him would never perish but have everlasting life.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (NLT) gives us a description of this agape love. Paul says, “Love is patient and kind.” Right there we go “Wow!” Husbands, love your wife; be patient and kind. “Love is not jealous or boastful or proud nor rude. It does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable and keeps no record of when it has been wronged.” You have a little list of things your wife does wrong. You bring it out once a year and tell her all about the wrongs. “It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever.” In the King James it says, “Love never fails.” This is agapao, agape love, as it is described in 1 Corinthians 13.

Now, in Colossians 3, this kind of love is what the husband is to have—or commanded to have—for his wife. Listen carefully. This kind of love, agape love, transforms and controls the exercise of the husband's authority. It makes tyranny, unkindness, selfishness and cruelty absolutely impossible. It removes from the submission expected of a wife all that is distasteful and difficult. I love that. When you have a husband who really agapes his wife, it's not a problem for a wife to submit to her husband. A lot of wives have trouble submitting to their husbands because they aren't loving their wives as Christ loved the church. There's no agape love there. They are little tyrants barking out orders and expecting their wives to obey them. No; husbands, you are to love your wives with agape love.

You might note also that in Galatians 5:22, this kind of love is the fruit of the Spirit. The evidence of the Spirit-filled life is not jumping up and down, clapping your hands and shouting "Hallelujah" in a church service. It's loving your wives on a daily basis. It's submitting to your husband. The evidence of a Spirit-filled life is manifested in the home. It's a husband loving his wife and a wife being submitted to her husband. It transforms that relationship. It is the fruit of the Spirit.

That's why in Ephesians 5:18, Paul tells us to "be filled with the Spirit." Ephesians 5 is what is called the "parallel passage." It's pretty hard to look at Colossians 3:19 without also looking at Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5:18 commands us to "be filled with the Spirit." Notice Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church..."—So he brings in that model or example of Christ, that metaphor of Christ and the church—"...and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it..."—that is, Christ and the church—"...with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause, shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined..."—or "cleaved"—"...unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh."

In this Ephesians passage, there are four qualities of a husband's agape love for his wife. It's so funny to me that so often when I'm preaching, the wife has her Bible open, she's listening but her husband's got his arms crossed and pouting. Mr. Macho. He'll look over once in a while and go, "Hmm." Wives, you need to hand him your Bible—tell him to get his own—give him a piece of paper and pencil, and tell him to write these down.

Four qualities of a husband's love for his wife. Number one, it should be a sacrificial love. Verse 25 of Ephesians 5 says, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and..."—Did what?—"...gave Himself for it." So Jesus is the pattern. How did Jesus love the church? Unconditionally. Your wife doesn't merit or deserve your love. She's to get it unconditionally, just as Christ loved the church. He loved us when we were yet sinners, when we were living in rebellion toward Him. So that's how a husband is to love his wife—sacrificially. He gave Himself for it. Husbands, are you willing to sacrifice for your wives?

Actually stay home on your day off and fix things around the house—which I plan to do tomorrow in light of this sermon. Seriously, before church this morning, I said, “Hey, tomorrow we’re just going to fix this and fix that and work around the house.”

She said, “Yes, that’s fine.”

I said, “Okay, because I have to preach on this.” Don’t look at the surf report, just stay home, get things done and make your wife happy. Or maybe even going shopping with your wife. What an unbelievable thought! You go, “Preacher, you’re starting to pry now. You’re not preaching anymore.” When a man enters a mall, he sees a sign over the door saying, “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.” But sacrifice; what you watch on TV, the time you spend with your wife. So it is to be a sacrificial love.

Secondly, it is to be a sanctifying love, Ephesians 5:26: “...that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word.” Now it’s speaking of Christ and the church, but the implication is that the husband is to have a sanctifying effect upon his wife. So I would ask you husbands, is your wife more like Jesus because of you or in spite of you?

Now the word “sanctify” means “to set apart.” One of the primary ways that God sanctifies us is by His Word. So husbands should have an influence upon their wives through the Word of God. Husbands should lead their wives into deeper knowledge of God’s Word, have a sanctifying effect upon his wife; that she’s set apart and holy. We should help our wives to become more in love with Jesus and more committed to His Word.

There is a third quality I want you husbands to note, and that is that it is to be an affectionate love. This should be a part of your marriage. Ephesians 5:28-29 says, “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh; but...”—here are the key words—“...nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.” The word “nourish” literally means “to warm with body heat.” You can almost translate that as “Husbands, hug your wives.” Give your wife a hug or a kiss. Tell her that you love her. “Oh, she knows I love her. I married her; didn’t I? I come home from work each day. What more do you want me to do? I eat her food. Heck, I love her.” Sure you do. Caress her and hug her and kiss her and tell her that you love her.

To “cherish” means “to protect, to care for lovingly, to hold dear, to keep in one’s mind.” I love that. Do you ever think about your wife? Do you ever pray for her during the day? Do you keep her near to your heart and want to know how she’s doing?

Martin Luther said, “Let the wife make the husband glad to come home, and make him make her sorry to see him leave.” I like that. How many guys in the world say, “I can’t go home. I gotta face the battleax.” (This isn’t me; I’m quoting other guys. I’m quoting non-Christians right now; okay?) I always get in trouble when I use humor; I’m going to get some e-mails this week. “I gotta get liquored up to go home to face her. I gotta go look at her. So I gotta go to the bar. I gotta stop at the Fuzzy Frog before I go home.” That happens. “I gotta have a couple beers

before I go home and face my wife.” That’s sad.

I love to be with guys who love their wives. They want to be with their wives, and they encourage each other to be with their wives. And when work is over, they go straight to their wives. They’re anxious to get home. They don’t want to go to the Fuzzy Frog for a couple hours, happy hour. “I want to get home to my wife. I love to be with my wife. I love to spend time with her.”

And then Martin Luther says, “...and make him make her sorry to see him leave.” When the husband leaves, the wife should be sorry, rather than happy. “Oh, good. Praise God, he’s leaving.”

You finally raise the kids, and you get to the empty-nest time and there’s just the two of you looking at each other. And the husband retires, and you’re both home. I’ve had wives say, “I don’t know what to do with him. He just stares at me all day long.” “Don’t you have anything else to do? Don’t you want to go somewhere or do something? For heaven’s sake!” I’m talking about that kind of love relationship in which you enjoy actually being together.

The fourth, and last quality, from Ephesians 5:31, is a husband’s love is to be unbreakable. It says, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and...”—here it is—“...shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.” Here Paul is quoting from Genesis 2:24. This is the foundational verse on marriage from the book of beginnings. Moses, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, recorded that “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave...”—or is “joined” or “glued”—“...unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.” So there is the leaving—it’s an exclusive love—; there’s the cleaving—it’s a permanent love;—and there’s the one flesh—it’s an intimate love. Intimacy is to be a part of the marriage relationship.

Jesus, quoting from that text in Genesis 2:24, said in Matthew 19:6, “...they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.” Those are words right out of the mouth of Jesus Christ. Agape love is an unbreakable love. It’s a love that will last a lifetime.

In Colossians 3:19, we look at the second command. It’s negative. The first one is positive: “Love your wives.” The second one is negative: “Be not bitter against them.” This is unique in that no other place in the New Testament does he use that exact word in a husband-wife relationship. The only other time the word “bitter” was used was in Revelation 8:11 where the bitter wormwood was used; the water had been made bitter poison, so it can’t be drunk. So God doesn’t want your marriage to be poisoned or turn sour.

By the way, this negative is an imperative in the present tense just like, “Husbands love your wives.” That means husbands are commanded not to be bitter against their wives, and they are commanded to do it continually, ongoing. When love weakens, bitterness sets in. A root of bitterness can poison your marriage.

When I do pre-marital counseling, there is a warning I give couples from Matthew 19:8. Jesus was approached by the Pharisees and Scribes and religious Jews, who were trying to trap him with the issue of divorce. They asked, “Is it okay for a man to get a divorce for any reason?” They wanted Jesus to commit to one school of thought or another; that a man can divorce his wife for any reason or there is no Biblical basis for divorce. What Jesus did was He quoted the Old Testament book of Genesis. He said that God made them “male and female” and that “a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave...”—or “join”—“...unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.” And then I just read you the statement that “What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”

They said to Jesus, “Ah-ha. We got you. Then why did Moses command us to give a writing of divorcement and to send her away?” They thought they had trapped Jesus. But you never trap the Son of God. Number one, Moses didn’t command them; he allowed them. Jesus said, “Moses didn’t command you; he allowed you to divorce your wife. But from the beginning, it was not God’s design for you to divorce your wife.” So divorce is a divine concession to human sin. He made it very, very, very clear. Jesus said that the only reason you could get a divorce was because of the “hardness of your hearts.” The hardness of your hearts allowed you to get a divorce.

This is what I warn couples of: don’t ever let your heart become hardened toward God. You take a husband who’s a Christian and a wife who’s a Christian and they both know the Lord—they both have God in their lives—there is no reason for their marriage to end in divorce, unless one or both of them harden their hearts. If one or both of them harden their hearts, that marriage will be poisoned. The Bible says, “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”

When Peter wrote his epistle, he said, “Husbands, you need to dwell with your wives, and give honor unto your wives as unto weaker vessels. Know that you are heirs together of the grace of life.” If you don’t do that, he says, “Your prayers are going to be hindered.” So I believe this with all my heart: The only way for a husband to be right with God is to be right with his wife. If you’re not obeying God in your relationship to your wife, then you are out of fellowship with God. So you need to keep your heart sensitive to God, to His Holy Spirit, to His Word, and you want to honor God and please God and be in fellowship with God. In doing that, you need to give honor to your wife as unto the weaker vessel. And remember, you’re “heirs together of the grace of life.” And remember, if not, then your prayers are going to be hindered. It’s one of the very clear statements in the Bible as to why God won’t answer your prayers; because you’re not treating your wife with respect and dwelling with her and loving her as Christ loved the church. You need to guard your heart.

In closing, the Bible tells us to be kind, it tells us to be tenderhearted, it tells us to “forgive one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven you.” So if there is a bitterness in your heart right now—“Well, she doesn’t submit the way I want her to” or “She doesn’t meet my needs” or “She doesn’t really give me enough attention” or “She nags me at home”—“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.”

Your love is to be a sacrificial, self-denying, giving love. And it's to be a forgiving love. Doesn't God forgive us of our sins? Yes. "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to clean us from all unrighteousness."

So you need to ask God to forgive you if you've had bitterness toward your wife. Or if you've had bitterness toward your husband. Then you need to ask each other to be forgiving of one another. The only way for a marriage to survive the years is if you've learn how to forgive. You must learn how to forgive, and you must guard your heart against becoming hard.