

“Marriage: The Foundation of a Home”

Colossians 3:18-19; Ephesians 5:22-33

Take your Bible this morning and turn with me to the third chapter of Colossians, verses 18-19. And then I also want you to find Ephesians 5, verses 22-33. I want to spend some time addressing the most fundamental relationships we have with one another. Our closest relationships are found within our own homes, husbands and wives, parents and children, children to their parents. Most fundamental is the relationship between husbands and wives. If the home is the basic building block of society, then marriage is the basic building block of the home. Before the children came along, God brought Adam and Eve together as a man and woman in marital union and the two became one flesh.

Several years ago, there was a Pew Research and Time Magazine survey that polled the American public as to the belief of whether or not marriage was becoming obsolete. An astounding 40% of respondents said yes. Among those in the traditional marrying age range (18-29), the number was four points higher at 44%. And this same survey, “The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families,” recorded a number of other shocking statistics about the deteriorating state of marriage and the family in our nation. Such as in 1960, 72% of all adults and 68% of people in their twenties were married. Fast forward 60 years, and those numbers had dropped to 52% and 26% respectively.

Given the current state of affairs in our society, it is obvious that the concept of marriage and family that most people have nowadays is in contrast to God’s design. Things are serious when 4 in 10 people agree that the most basic institution of society is becoming obsolete and antiquated. Our culture’s departure from divine design merely shows what has been true from the beginning—sin has affected every part of human life and marriage is no

exception. It has not come under attack in our society all at once. It has been under attack since the serpent slid into God's garden and claimed to offer something better. Because of our sin, marriage is a challenge. It takes work and is not easy no matter what age you are. Marriage is difficult, and that's why the divorce rate is so high. Divorce is one of the most prevalent and widespread problems in our culture today, and this is even true within the church. I've heard that as many as 8 in 10 people have been either directly or indirectly affected by divorce. For a lot of people, the mention of this subject is a painful reminder of wounds from the past and brings up memories and feelings that they'd rather forget.

Yet the fact remains that marriage is under attack in our generation. Why does marriage seem to be in so much trouble today?

Christianity Today — *“Marriage is in trouble today because society and the church have a faulty view of it, a deified myth of this human, delightful, yet flawed institution. Though fertility gods have been dethroned by the advance of Christianity, today's culture seems to be resurrecting them in a more palatable form. Most voices today laud a romantic image of marriage as life's ultimate true source of joy. What is the result? The result is a crash, thousands of crashes. In reality, every marriage faces its share of conflict, misunderstanding, broken dreams, and bruised egos. Any real marriage held up against the yard stick of total joy will measure short. And if relationships that are meant to give total joy fail, the lives of the people who are in them are often shattered.”*

Young people get married with an illusion of what they think marriage is—no conflict, problems, or disappointments. Or that it is all about you getting your needs met. God has a very different idea of marriage, one that is not focused on getting. By its very design, marriage is a relationship that elevates giving. The

modern understanding of marriage has been trivialized to nothing more than a shallow relationship that dissolves when romantic feelings give out. And yet there is no relationship in life that carries more potential for closeness and intimacy with another human being than marriage. At the same time, there's no relationship that carries a greater potential for conflict. The phrase 'battle of the sexes' exists for a reason. Marriage is a relationship between two imperfect people. Left unchecked, sin in the heart reeks havoc in the home.

In Colossians 3, Paul has been talking about the practical ways we live out our faith in Jesus. It involves putting off and putting on. We've put off the old self, and we've put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator. He mentions the character of Christ, the peace of Christ, the Word of Christ, and the name of Christ which we now live for. And then he works his way outward to apply this to our closest relationships. If our faith is genuine, it will touch every area of our lives, which includes our family dynamic. Paul shows what a Christian family looks like when it is living under the rule of the Lord Jesus. (Read)

Like most of his letters, the first part is doctrinal and the last part turns to the practical. He does the same thing in the letter to the Ephesians. In the first three chapters, Paul describes the believer's wealth. Then in chapters 4-6, he describes the believer's walk. To say it another way, the first half of Ephesians focuses on what we have been given in Christ. The second half points to the practical ways our lives should reflect what we have been given in Christ. We inherit spiritual wealth by faith, and we invest that wealth by obedient living. And every day we must draw on these resources as we seek to build godly marriages and godly families. This morning, I intend to look at these verses as well as the

parallel text found in Ephesians 5 and make three general observations about marriage. First of all, notice that in marriage we have:

1—A PURPOSE to live for (Col. 3:18-19; Eph. 5:22-23)

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.”

The instruction Paul gives to wives involves submitting to the leadership of their husband, as it is ‘fitting’ in the Lord. It is the picture of womanhood upheld in Proverbs 31:

Proverbs 31:11-12—“The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.”

Husbands are told to love their wives and to not be ‘harsh’ with them. The word means to be bitter against. A young woman looking to marry should wisely choose who she is about to marry. Is he someone you respect? How does he treat other people, especially those weaker than him? How does he treat his mother, and how does he behave around other women in general?

The counterpart to this passage can be found in Ephesians 5:22, extending through verse 33, is the longest treatment in the New Testament on the subject of marriage. It is part of a larger passage whose context deals with a Christian’s relationships within the church, in the home, and at work. Paul’s point here is that the gospel fundamentally changes everything in a person’s life, including our relationships. In this text, Paul says essentially the same thing about wives submitting to their husbands, as to the Lord, and husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church.

Before we examine the roles and responsibilities of wives to their husbands and husbands to their wives, we need to consider what marriage is. We need to keep before us the fundamental purpose that God has in mind in it. Marriage reflects the purpose and design for which God created human society to flourish. We go all the way back to the beginning verses of the Bible. You will notice that this is what Paul does in:

Ephesians 5:31 — “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

He is quoting directly from Genesis 2:24 and the passage where God creates Eve from Adam’s side and gives her to him as a companion. This same verse is referenced at least four separate times throughout the New Testament—Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7, 1 Corinthians 6:16, and here in Ephesians 5:31. He is making an appeal to God’s original design. In Genesis 2, we’re given an intimate description of creation that centers around the first human couple.

We are made for a reason

After having created the world and everything in it, the crown of creation is humanity made in the image of God. The Lord creates a man out of the dust of the earth. He breathes into him the breath of life. Man and woman are created with a uniqueness that sets them apart from anything else that God makes.

Genesis 1:26-27 — “Then God said, Let us make man in Our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping things that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.”

To say that we've been made in the image of God means we've been made with a unique capacity to reflect God's character. It means we've been formed for relationship with God, that we are to bear witness of God. When our first parents fell, something happened to distort the image of God in man as sin entered the picture and corrupted our moral faculties. Only Jesus Christ can restore it!

Psalm 139:13-14—“For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise You for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well.”

We are made for responsibility

Notice what Genesis 2:15 says:

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”

The Hebrew words used here for 'work' and 'keep' are also used to describe the responsibilities of those who served in the Tabernacle later on in Israel's history. Some have even suggested that it can be translated as 'worship' and 'obey.' The idea is that man was created to honor God with the work of his hands. Man has been created to find fulfillment not in idleness and laziness, but in a life of rewarding labor in obedience to God's command. Sin's curse meant that Adam worked by the sweat of his brow. He'd often have nothing to show for his labor but thorns and thistles. Work was never a part of the curse, though it has been affected by it. Responsibility was instituted before the fall and is part of God's design for our lives. Work and accomplishment is a good thing, inasmuch as it does not become a 'god' thing. Like everything else it touches, sin corrupts our work. Now, we work by the sweat of our brow and watch as the fruit of our work decays.

We are made for a reason, we are made for responsibility, and then notice also that:

We are made for relationship

When you read the first two chapters of the Bible, the phrase, 'it was good,' is descriptive of everything that God made. However, there was only one thing that was not good. God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone."

Therefore, God determined to create a helper who would be suitable for the man, someone who was like him in every way, but also different.

"Helper" — *entails his inadequacy vs. her inferiority*

Taken from Adam's side, God formed Eve from one of his ribs. The woman is in no way inferior to the man, but is a suitable companion and partner for him. She complements him and makes up for what he lacks. Man and woman are equal, but different. She is not taken from his head for her to rule over him, nor is she taken from his feet for him to trample over her, but she is taken from Adam's side as his equal but altogether different partner. Her femininity is distinct from his masculinity.

I read something once by Maggie Gallagher, who had served as the president of the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, as well as chairwoman of the National Organization for Marriage. She wrote:

Maggie Gallagher — *"I think it's important to recognize that marriage is a virtually universal human social institution. It exists in just about every known human society...yet it has a certain basic and recognizable shape. Marriage as a universal human idea is always a public union, not just a private and personal one. It's a physical union between a man and a woman...in which the rights and*

responsibilities of the man and the woman towards each other and their children are publicly defined and supported. There aren't that many human universals, and you have to ask yourself, 'Why?' Why is it that human beings, over and over again in all these wildly diverse societies—in the steppes of Asia and the jungles of the Amazon and the deserts of Africa, completely disconnected by religion, by economy, by culture, by history—why do human beings keep coming up with this same basic marriage idea?"

The answer lies in the fact that marriage is God's idea and is an integral part of the glue that holds human society together. The roles of men and women have been worked into the very fabric of our humanity. It is the Creator's design!

What does Paul say is the responsibility of the Christian wife to her husband? He tells us that it involves her willing submission to his leadership. In creation, God has given to man the role of leadership. God has done this from the beginning. Paul makes the same argument in 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11. By design, God has made man and woman equal, but He didn't make them identical. Have you noticed that lately?

I remember seeing a clip of something that Joe McGee said...The average woman speaks 20,000 words a day while the average man speaks only 7,000. That's why 84% of domestic violence is a man hitting a woman and not a woman hitting a man. It is not because he is stronger, it is because he ran out of words. Ladies, don't ever get your husband wound up at night. He's out of words. When a man goes to sleep at night, 70% of his brain shuts down. A woman, however, when she is in her deepest sleep 90% of her brain is still active. Women have two 'x' chromosomes while men only have one. That's why all men look like they got dressed at the Salvation Army. We only see the colors of the rainbow. We don't see chartreuse. Women have 180 degree peripheral vision,

while men have long range vision. That's why men are four times more likely to be broad sided in an accident than women. We literally can't see it coming. Men see things better from long distances. God made us that way. Men are hunters and providers. That explains why we can't see things that are literally right under our noses—socks, keys, my phone.

Men and women are equal, but different. If you take a brain scan of a man when he's reading something, you will find that he is virtually deaf. We men tend to get in the zone. To go to the reading part of my brain I must leave the hearing part. We have doors in our brains. If we go to one room, we shut the door behind us. A woman can have all the doors of her brain open at the same time. Women are much better multi-taskers! God gave you an opposite who makes up for what you lack. That's a good thing.

My wife is better than me at a lot of things. Athletically, you don't want me on your team. But you do want Anita, let me tell you. Organizationally and administratively, she is light years ahead of me. There aren't too many cases where I've met a couple and didn't come to an understanding that the wife was smarter than her husband. Guys, you know I'm right about it.

Eve is everything that Adam is not, and vice verse. So it is God who performs the first marriage in the garden of Eden. Eve is taken from Adam's side and is brought to him as a help mate, a complementary partner, and the two of them are one flesh.

It is this same design for marriage that Jesus upheld:

Matthew 19:4-6—“Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall

become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

In other words, don't let man mess with what God Himself has manufactured. The design in which God intended the human family to function is not subject to redefinition. And yet we know that sin marred God's design for marriage and the home. We see early evidence of this in the Scriptures.

Genesis 4:19—“Then Lamech took for himself two wives.”

We must not confuse what the Bible reports with what it endorses. When the Bible reports men with multiple wives, it is merely stating the facts. Bigamy, polygamy, and other human inventions were never part of God's design for marriage. God's design involves one man and one woman who come together as one flesh.

Before I move on, I do believe that it is important to point out something here. One of the ideas of our time is that if you are not in a relationship, you can't be fulfilled. Your life is somehow 'less than' if you are single. This often creates great pressure for people to identify with other people and seek their worth from others. There are those who have a call from God to singleness, and that's okay. Your worth as an individual comes from Christ and no one else.

2—A POWER to live in (Col. 3:16-17; Eph. 5:18-21)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...and whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

We often miss the important context that overarches these instructions that the apostle Paul outlines for marriage and the family. We jump to the commands

themselves and we overlook the very important truth from which they arise. It is within the context of life in the Spirit that Paul is writing. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that our home and marriage can be what God wants it to be. Christian marriage always involves three parties—a husband, a wife, and Almighty God. It is a cord of three strands! Which means the key to a successful Christian marriage involves the Word of God and being filled with the Spirit. The filling of the Holy Spirit refers to His control and empowerment in the lives of believers to enable us to live the Christian life.

When you see these instructions for marriage given in the context of a Spirit-filled life, they will take on new meaning for you. The power we need to establish a godly home is not left up to us. For God has already graciously supplied Christian husbands and wives the tools and the resources they need to walk together in harmony. It is now simply a matter of you and me appropriating those resources and consciously yielding to the life of the Spirit within. God gave us the Holy Spirit because He knows something we tend to forget—it is impossible to live the Christian life on our own. If you could, you wouldn't need the Holy Spirit. His power would not be necessary. Jesus said:

John 15:5—“Apart from Me you can do nothing.”

Jesus didn't say that we can do a few things, or even that we need His help. The Christian life is a supernatural life, which means we need supernatural ability to live it. And the only thing that makes you more powerful now than before you were saved is the presence of the Spirit.

1 John 4:4—“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

There is a greater power at work in you as a believer than anywhere in the world. It is not a matter of you trying your best and letting the Holy Spirit make up the

difference. Rather, it involves you daily dying to self and making the conscious decision to walk in the fullness of the Spirit. Our failure to understand this is what makes up for 99.9% of the problems in Christian marriages. Too full of ourselves!

James 4:1 — “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?”

Selfish desire is the number one culprit behind marital conflict. It reminds me of an epitaph a man had etched on his tombstone:

*Beneath these stones do lie,
Back to back, my wife and I!
When the last trumpet the air shall fill,
If she gets up, I'll just lie still.*

Some couples live and die at odds with one another. Why such conflict? It is because of who is in control. Selfish people will always be at odds with others in their lives. The focus of their heart is getting and not giving. When I am in control, it is a disaster. But when I'm under control, I have access to a power that enables me to do all things. That is why conflict in marriage almost always results from a heart that is self-directed rather than Spirit-controlled. And when self insists on its own rights, then peace will be elusive and absent. The self-centered life is always in a battle for the top. It pushes others down as it insists on being first. Spirit-filled living lifts others up and is willing to be last. A purpose to live for, a power to live in, and there's a final thing that I want to point out:

3—A PRINCIPLE to live by (Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:21)

“...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ...as to the Lord...as the church submits to Christ...as Christ loved the church.”

Notice that here within all of these verses, the apostle Paul presupposes that believers are living and abiding under the authority of Christ. Our authority on the issue of marriage is the Word of God. A believer who is living in submission to the authority of Scripture will have no problem with these commands given to husbands and wives.

If you go back one verse, you will discover that submission is to be characteristic of every relationship. We all have an obligation to be humble and submissive. Verse 21 says we are to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

“Be Subject” — *military term meaning to rank under*

The idea is the Spirit-filled believers rank themselves under one another rather than exalting themselves above one another. The main idea is that of relinquishing your rights in favor of another. You will remember what Jesus said to His disciples as they were arguing back and forth about who was the greatest. He said:

Matthew 20:25-28—“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

The person who is filled with the Spirit doesn't insist on being first, but is willing to rank themselves under another. Such an attitude is to be reflective of all of our relationships within the church. And notice in verse 22, this principle is carried into the marriage relationship. It is to characterize every relationship we have. And in Ephesians 6, Paul will conclude with a general call to arms by reminding

us of the nature of spiritual conflict. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Alistair Begg — *“It is clearly seen in the agitation on the part of the evil one to encourage us to take what God has given for our good and for His glory and to pervert it in such a fashion that the beauty and the wholeness and the enjoyment of that which God has made for our good is lost in the pursuit of selfish pleasure.”*

Our culture does this, and I’m not surprised that it does. If on one hand I look at the Bible and then on the other I look around at the culture, I am presented with conflicting ideas. I look at Scripture and see the design of God. But then I look around in society and see the departure of a culture, it doesn’t look like things are going the way they ought to go. By nature, humanity is in rebellion against God. Sinful man says, “I don’t like this idea, so I have another one that I am going to substitute in its place.” It is impossible for society to go down that road without it having an impact in all these negative ways we now see. And where we’re now seeing a radical departure from the divine design when it comes to marriage and the family. But that is the way it has always been with a fallen, broken world.

With that said, there is a bigger elephant in the room. The issue that is most alarming to me is not that a contrary view to God’s design exists outside the church. That’s to be expected among those who do not know and worship our God. I’m more concerned that these contrary views are beginning to exist inside the church. Within our Christian circles, those who profess to believe the Bible are now for whatever reason prepared to tamper with the Bible, to readjust the Bible, in order to accommodate the thoughts and popular viewpoints of the day. The real question is, “Does the church believe the Bible?” Many who profess Christ have placed themselves above the Scriptures rather than under the Scriptures. And that simply cannot be.

Augustine — *“If you believe what you like in the Scriptures and reject what you don’t like, it is not the Scriptures that you believe but yourself.”*

We’ve allowed the world to influence our thinking on the most basic relationships we have in the home. Even within the church, men and women are more prone to get their relationship advice from the magazine rack while standing in line at Wal-Mart than they are the holy Scriptures. The Bible doesn’t present us with advice. Rather, it presents us with authority that is binding on our lives. We must not trust our own minds above the mind of the Holy Spirit. Paul is speaking to the Ephesians as fellow Christians, and the principles that he outlines here in this fifth chapter find their power and effectiveness only in the fear of Christ. It is the same thing in Colossians 3. A family can only be what God has designed it to be when the members of the family are functioning in the way God designed them to be. Friends, the number one goal for every wife and for every husband is to be conformed to the image of Christ.

John MacArthur — *“Just as an individual can find fulfillment only in a right relationship with God, so the family can find complete fulfillment only as believing parents and children follow His design for the family in the control and power of the Holy Spirit.”*

Perhaps a fitting question to ask yourself is this—“Am I in submission to the authority of the Bible? Am I filled with the Spirit as a Christian wife, as a Christian husband?” We shouldn’t really be surprised when a world that rejects our Savior also rejects His standards. Christ’s standards of ethics cannot be understood or appreciated by anyone who doesn’t know Him as Savior and Lord. The world around us doesn’t agree with what the Bible says about marriage because it doesn’t agree with what the Bible says about Jesus Christ. I could spend a whole lot of time giving you bullet points for marriage. We could spend time talking

about love languages and his/her stuff. And all of that certainly has its time and place. But most important to me this morning is whether or not your life is submitted to the authority of the Bible, and whether or not you as a person are filled with the Holy Spirit. A tender, submissive spirit is essential for any progress in the realm of our relationships, be it in marriage or in the home or the church or wherever.

Some of you ladies are perhaps married to a man who is not a Christian. You are doing your very best to represent Christ in your home to your children, but you get no support from your husband because he is lost. Listen to this:

1 Peter 3:1-2—“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, when they see your respect and pure conduct.”

He says that the way you live your life, the way that you live out your faith, it has a spiritual impact whether you can see it or not. Through your actions, your devotion, through your surrendered spirit, you ‘flesh out’ the gospel before the eyes of your husband. In fact, some of you men who are listening this morning have this very testimony. It was the faithful example of your wife who brought you to faith in Jesus Christ.

It isn’t easy, but in Christ you can have all the strength and power you need to build a healthy home. We need gospel-centered homes and gospel-centered marriages. It begins with a husband and wife who commit themselves to the Lord Jesus in all things. If a wife is to submit to her husband as to the Lord, that means she first must know the Lord. If a husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church, that means that he must first know Christ. It is only as Christ is

foremost in my heart and life that I can be the husband, father, and man that God wants me to be. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I saved? Is there evidence in my life of personal salvation?
- Am I submitted? Do I place myself above or under the Scriptures?
- Am I Spirit-filled? Have I yielded my life today to the Spirit?