

Colossians – October 26th, 2014 – Colossians 3:18-21 Part 1, vs. 18

The third concentrated teaching block in Colossians chapters 3 & 4 relates to family.

The Christian and his/her relationship to the family at home. 3:18-21

Vs. 18 – “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (NASB).

“Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (NIV).

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord” (KJB).

As a result of events that occurred in the early to mid-1960's, when second wave feminism was launched, I would like to spend a few minutes in “introductory remarks,” balancing and mildly softening those words “submit” and “subject” prior to studying vs. 18 itself. This is necessary because of the charged atmosphere between the sexes that we find ourselves living in.

Introductory remarks

1. In the time of Paul, contemporary Greek/Roman culture had ethical instructions which constituted what acceptable family relationships should look like (as does our culture). Those “instructions” were mixed, some giving more significant roles to the wife and the children, some giving less significant roles. Paul does not reject those values outright but takes the ones that align with Biblical thinking and “Christianizes” them. That is, he links them to Old Testament Biblical instruction and then elevates them to the higher godly standard. In so doing, Paul brings those family relations under the rule of Christ, giving them new motivation and inspiration, making them into something done for the Lord (e.g. vs. 18 “as is fitting in the Lord”).
2. Critics of Paul's thoughts in verse 18 urge that no transfer of his antiquated ideas should be made to our modern and obviously different culture. Something fitting for Paul's day may be much less suitable today. Although I understand that point and believe it can be true in some issues of the Bible (although the “principle” behind the teaching will not have changed from ancient days to our own), I don't think the “critics” are reasoning correctly here. Paul's understanding of this matter and his subsequent instructions to the Colossians are based not on the culture of his day nor some twisted perverted male viewpoint. Rather, his teachings on this subject always go back to the root of our personhood as found in what we were intended to be at creation. 1 Tim 2:13-14 illustrates this. “For it was Adam who was created first, and then Eve ...” Thus, if we understand: a.) the Bible to be the word of God and b.) Paul to have been chosen as an apostle, our confidence in Paul's evaluation soars. It was the order of creation that helped an inspired apostle draw conclusions about the husband/wife roles, not his culture.
3. The Biblical emphasis on submissiveness and subordination in **all** human relationships is impressive and frightening for people today. Yet, it is a kind of “rule of the road” for all social harmony! Imagine the chaos at the grocery store, if people didn't respect and submit to the standard of letting others who got to the cash register first pay first. Same thing with four way stops. It is a general “rule of the road” for social harmony that you willingly subordinate yourself before others in many cultural contexts. As Ephesians 5:21 says, “Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” That includes me. There is a sense in which I am to be “subject” to my wife since she is one of the “one another's.” Hence, in one sense, husbands and wives are to live in a mutual subjection, a mutual submission. If the husband's duty for reciprocal subjection to his wife is removed, you end up with a despot (a ruler with unlimited absolute authority), an unruly king, a master who looks at his wife as his slave. Hence, to get the right balance on this issue,

you need to look at the other side of the coin, which is, all people are to submit to one another, that includes husbands in submission to their wives. Philippians 2:3, 5 “With humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself ... as Christ did.” So if we adopt a master/slave mentality when it comes to husband/wife interactions, we fly straight in the face of Philippians 2. When this entire matter is balanced and articulated properly, it should not be offensive to those in our day who want to do what is proper but are confused about what God has ordained for us in family relationships. As we have just seen, when it comes to “submission,” it is not to be the duty of some to be submissive, but the duty of all.

4. Since Jesus, the Son of God, is simultaneously **equal** with the Father and **yet submissive** to the Father, then equality and submissiveness can co-exist also in human relationships. If Christ has demonstrated that He can be equal with God in essence and nature, and yet submit Himself to His Father in heaven ... if He can do it, then there is a model for humanity. “Gender” roles are the human counterpart to that heavenly example. It follows therefore that the submissiveness expressed for wives and children in this section need not be in opposition to the fact of their equality by nature. Any idea that wives are inferior, by nature, to their husbands, is wrong, that teaching does not come from the Bible, even though the Bible uses the word “submission” or “subjection.” So, “mere slaves” or “silent but pretty potted plants” has nothing to do with any correct understanding of the Biblical teaching on this matter of submission.

Back to the text

In spite of these introductory balances teaching mutual subjection, nevertheless, there is a special way, vs. 18, in which the apostle commands, “Wives, be **subject** to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.” “Subject” is not a synonym for “slavery,” where the slave has no rights nor anything to add to the relationship other than the duty to obey, though sometimes it has been interpreted as such by misguided teachers.

In other contexts, the Greek word for “subject” (Gk. = hupotasso) is used in relation to how citizens, soldiers, and children respond, at the proper time and the proper way, to authority. In other words, submit or subject, “hupotasso,” means “to yield yourself, or put yourself under the authority, to place oneself under it, subordinate oneself to it, to obey it.” God has arranged human affairs such that a measure of authority must be exercised if human society is to hold together. There is societal “ordering” from top to bottom, the government, the military, business, regular everyday jobs, family, an ordering, with authority, that’s the way God has seen fit to direct proper functioning in society. The mall parking lot with no lines drawn for driving lanes or parking places is a situation that results in pandemonium. The lines provide an authority for orderly driving. That’s the way all of life is arranged, provisions for authority. At any rate, **“to yield or subject oneself is to submit to the declarations or final control of another.”**

The family unit is no exception to the universal rule of ordered authority. There must be recognition of a divinely-given “order of final authority.” We can disregard this “order” and refuse to go along. But if the family order of authority is part of the nature of things as God has made them, we ignore the order of authority at the cost of destroying the family itself. The family will cease to exist as “family,” in the way that God designed it. Besides this, abandon God’s plan and an entirely new set of problems will result as parents attempt to live independent lives or reversed-order-of-authority lives, with no binding concept of loyalty, love and the proper carrying out of our “role.” Mary Kassian, in her epic book, “Girls Gone Wise,” p. 120, relates this true story as an example of what we are speaking about here. She says,

The rules in our culture have changed. Social convention now stipulates that women can and ought to be initiators in male-female relationships. They can take the lead. This may sound normal in our day, and good in theory, but it doesn't work very well in practice. I constantly see the carnage resulting from this approach. I think of Heidi, a Christian woman who bought into the "roles don't matter" paradigm. She saw a guy she liked. She asked him out. She insisted on paying for half their dates. She called him. She kissed him. She brought up the subject of marriage. She negotiated the terms. She insisted on a hyphenated name. She made him give up his job and move because of her job, since she made more money. And since she did make more money, she made him stay home with the kids when they were young. OK. Now fast-forward ten years into their relationship: Heidi hates her husband. Her complaint? He's become unmotivated, a deadweight. She has to beg him to do anything. He doesn't initiate. He's wimpy, he whines, and is disgusting. She feels like she is the only one contributing and she's exhausted.

Wait a minute, Heidi. Let me get this straight: You asked him out, you pursued him. You took the lead. You dominated the relationship. Like putty in your hand, you molded him into what you wanted him to be ... and now you hate him for it? What's more, you expect him to go against years of emasculation and suddenly become a man? Why should he? You're the "man" in the house – at least you pretended that you could be.

Details differ, but I can't tell you how many "Heidis" have ended up crying on my shoulder, dismayed that their husbands are wimps and not men – that they are passive and won't lead. Inevitably, it only takes a few pointed questions to discover why. It's usually because, right from the start, the woman "wore the pants." A major notion of this generation is that gender roles are insignificant and irrelevant. It doesn't matter who wears the pants in the family. In fact, it's good if women take the wheel since men have had their turn and for far too long! The problem is, this tragic social experiment neglects to take the created design of male and female into consideration. It assumes that we get to decide for ourselves what manhood, womanhood, and male-female relationships are all about.

Mary Kassian, the person who originally told this story I just cited, is a heroine in the Zionsville Livengood family. She gets it; she deeply moves my thoroughly male heart (in a wholesome way). Kathryn even sent me two pictures of her, which I still have on my cell phone, taken at the True Woman conference here in Indianapolis just two weeks back. In 2002, she, along with Nancy Leigh DeMoss, Holly Eliff, and Kim Wagner launched a counter-revolution to the modern feminist movement which Betty Freidan and 27 others began in 1966. The story that I reproduced above illustrates the point that I already made just before the story, ***disobedience to God's ways always brings new and unforeseen problems into the human experience.***

Paul continues in verse 18, wives, subject yourselves to your husband, "as is fitting in the Lord." In Paul's concept, a married woman who has surrendered herself to Christ, who is in heaven, will demonstrate her sincere Christian heart by visibly submitting to an earthly husband if she has one. A Christian woman's submission to her husband is a mirror of her submission to the Lord Jesus. So, we can say, "Oh that stinking Paul. What does he know?" Or, "Well, he is for another age." But Paul's words will come back with, "Wait a minute, the wife's submission is what is fitting in the Lord." Alas, some husbands do little to deserve the loyalty and subjection of a true and godly wife. That is for later.

In the meantime, one might wonder how this "Wives, subject yourselves to your husband, as is fitting in the Lord" would play out. Remember, it has nothing to do with inferiority or being a

slave. Rather, it is a general attitude that characterizes the wife's outlook in the marriage. Perhaps it is easier to visualize if we were to get personal with a couple of illustrations. Let's look at two simple examples in my life.

Example number 1

Last summer, my family was on vacation at the Outer Banks. I noticed that there was a storm-like set of clouds blowing up in the distance. We were all having fun on the beach but I kept my eye on those dark and menacing clouds. I began to get nervous about what was about to unfold and expressed my concerns to Kathryn, who most of you know, is my wife. Kathryn looked down the beach as far as she could see in both directions and it didn't look like anyone else was packing up. She also thought, "I've been coming here to the Outer Banks for 20 years and this isn't how the bad storms seem to develop." Hence, in her heart, she believed that the storm, if it came at all, would blow up on the other side of the island and not come to the ocean side, which is where we were. Her inclination was to stay put, although her unspoken inner attitude was that if Jim says we should go in, we're going in, end of story. Neither of us particularly wanted to pack up and go. No one else was. But I watched the wind and the darkness and suddenly got a feeling that we should leave. Finally, I expressed my concern that it was time to head in. Without a moment's hesitation, Kathryn said to the kids, "Let's pack up" and we did. We left the beach to head back to the room. Jyri, our 10 year old son, asked, "Why do we have to go in?" **[And now for the money line]** With no hesitation, Kathryn said, "It's your dad's job to be the protector of the family. If he says it's time to go in, we're going in." Friends, that kind of support for me and my leadership as the husband, is exactly what we are talking about in this verse 18. This illustrates the ideal display of "submission" in a completely perfect manner. If anyone thinks this example is ridiculous, let me assure you that this little incident is part and parcel of what it means for wives to be "submissive" to their husbands as is fitting in the Lord. In these little every day matters, I never feel second guessed. Instead, I feel Kathryn's love, her support, and the subjection of herself to me all the time. It's powerful. It allows me to feel like the leader of the home and if you recall, the Greek word for "subject" or "submit" is "to yield yourself, or put yourself, under the authority or direction of another." As a further example of Kathryn's wisdom in this matter, she secretly hoped a storm would come since it would provide, from the school of life, a lesson for our boy, who needs to know his role when he becomes a husband. Guess what? We hardly made it to the balcony of our room when a wicked and vicious storm rolled across the very beach where we had been sitting. It came upon the area so fast that we watched all kinds of people racing to get packed to leave while getting drenched with the downpour. Meantime, I felt the love and support of a wonderful wife.

Example number 2 from my life (it's okay to say, "gag with me a spoon" as I relate these stories)

Kathryn and I are in the middle of a home project. We are going through the house and spackling all the gouges, holes, cracks in walls, and then repainting the repaired surfaces. Those things accumulate over time. This past Tuesday, Kathryn said to me, "Jim, could you look at this with me? I want your opinion." So I walked into the room to which she directed me and looked at a small five inch horizontal tear in the paper of the dry wall. Kathryn asked, "Do you think that should be repaired or do you think it is okay to paint over it?" Here's the thing about that little innocent question. She would have accepted, without question or complaint, whatever I said about the matter. It was as if I REALLY and truly was the authority in the house ... and whatever I decided was okay

with her. I took one look at it, groaned, and said, "We need to fix it." I grabbed the utility knife and spackling and within 5 minutes, had the tear cut out and the spackling in place. But here is what happened inside of me. I thought, "Wow, without fanfare, Kathryn just let me be the husband in the family. She yielded to my authority without blinking an eye and quite frankly, I loved it. I was all proud as the husband, and the male, and thought to myself, "What a great wife I have." I will say one more time. These little examples sound trite in and of themselves. But they represent a way of life for Kathryn that has lasted over four years now. You can fake something for several months, maybe a year. But eventually, the real person will show up and now that 4 years have passed, I believe it is simply who she is.

God's intention for marriage is that both the wife and the husband enact their roles in a godly manner. When both naturally do so, things work incredibly well. It is so easy to live with the other when both get their roles and live them out correctly. You always hear that marriage is so difficult and that you really have to work at it. That has not been our experience so far. It's okay if you ask us if that is still the case in ten years. But I think that as long as we both maintain humility and carry forth with our individual calling as husband and wife, ten years won't change the picture.

Other considerations in regards to the wife's subjection to her husband

1. When does the wife submit?

Answer: It is a general attitude that characterizes her outlook in marriage

2. Can the wife give her opinion on a matter?

Answer: Of course, submission does not mean blindly and silently following the husband's every whim. As the helpmate, God intends for her to give her husband all kinds of input (a good husband should covet her input). Her God-ordained feminine viewpoint (when evaluating life situations) as well as her unique understanding of the husband qualifies her to share her wisdom with him in many ways. Of course, she should not become a leaky faucet either ☺ Proverbs 27:15

3. Is there a time when the wife should say "No" to her husband's leadership directives?

Answer: Absolutely. The husband does not replace Christ as the woman's ultimate authority. Thus, she must not follow her husband's leadership into sin. She should not "steal" with him, "savor" pornography with him, or help him develop deceptive and sinful schemes. Nor should she allow his commands for her to stop following Jesus lesson her relationship with Jesus one iota. Yet, even where a Christian wife has to stand with Christ against the sinful will of her husband, she can still have a spirit of submission. She can show by her attitude and behavior that she does not like resisting his will and longs for him to forsake sin so that her disposition to honor him as head can again produce harmony.

4. What if the husband himself (or a particular decision he makes) does not deserve to be submitted to? Should the wife subject herself still?

Answer: In my opinion, this is THE most difficult of all the questions we have asked to answer. There are so many areas that this could cover that to give one answer is very difficult. For example, the husband is a lazy bum, should the wife accept that and submit. Or, the husband is making decisions that are ruining the family, or the family finances. Should the wife willingly accept that and submit? What if the husband is not even a believer? Should a wife willingly submit to a husband who is opposed to Christ? With a

wide array of various possibilities regarding poor husband behavior, how do we come to a conclusion on these things? As a guideline in which to draw a course of action, we should recall 1 Peter 3:1-4, which reads, "Wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Let not your adornment be merely external ... but let it be the hidden person of the heart." This is wonderful counsel in giving general direction, but if by this we mean that the wife must silently submit and accept the lousy husband as is, then I must declare that that position is not acceptable. I get so frustrated with some husbands that I want to tell the wife to throw the bum out! I have resisted giving that counsel so far but sometimes I want to!!!

One answer that must be given to this situation is that plenty of discussion needs to occur. In my view, the wife must ask the husband, "Why do you desire to destroy the family?" There may be a fine line between frank discussion of this matter and becoming a nag, but the wife has to address the matter to some degree in seeking a resolution. Surely some humility can accompany the discussion, but to silently sit back and let life or family be destroyed is impossible. Submission in the face of wrong-doing does not mean silence. The wife should first seek much prayer over the matter, perhaps prayer with fasting. She should also approach him with humility, freely admitting her own short comings (so as to not come off as Miss Self-righteous), and demonstrate an attitude of "I want both us to overcome our weaknesses so that the family can solidify again." There may come a day when a resolution will not be found. At which point, the wife should not seek to drag the wayward husband off the cross (by enabling him) and thus prevent God from dealing with him.

5. Should the wife mock, gloat, or belittle the husband when he makes a bad decision and bad things result?

Answer: Never. She should grieve with him. Sometimes, she should remind him that he walked this path before and the results were bad. She can also exhibit frustration, if she doesn't act like a dragon when doing so.

6. Doesn't this entire concept of "submission to the husband" shackle the wife and keep her from true freedom?

Answer: That line of thinking was the entire thrust of the second wave feminist movement, which began in 1967. The thought that "living life as God decrees results in getting cheated out of what is best for me" is a false and desperately misguided premise, one that comes directly from Satan, the enemy of God. Look where this attitude has driven us, in our culture, in terms of family and happiness. To live life according to the dictates of the feminist movement robs women of the joy that they otherwise could have had. God knows what is best for us since He created us. "Do not submit" is a dictate that replaces God's best. It stems from the false idea that says, "I know what is best for me. I know better than God. I'm going to reach out and grab the life that I consider best." In the end, the feminist lifestyle turns out to be hollow, angry, and ultimately empty.

Conclusion

Living according to God's design for each gender will always be the righteous and effective way to live. Defining our roles according to man's way is sin and CAN not bring ultimate happiness.