

## WIVES, SUBMIT! (COLOSSIANS 3:18)

Please take your Bibles and turn to Colossians 3. As you are turning there, I'm going to ask you a rather *weird* question. You ready? Here goes: "Is it permissible to **quote yourself**?"

**Why** do I ask? Because I'm about to give you a word-for-word quote of something I said back in March and I want to make sure **it is okay** for me to do that! But—since I couldn't wait **until today** to get the answer from **you**—I went ahead and "asked Google" instead! And here's the on-line answer: "Quoting yourself is **permissible** in **most** contexts, but it must be **done with care** to avoid issues of **self-plagiarism** and to maintain clarity and professionalism."

"Avoid issues of self-plagiarism"?! Who ever **heard** of such a thing?! On the other hand, who ever heard of a guy **wondering if he could quote** himself? And some of you are thinking, 'Pastor, we used to **wonder** if you were weird, but we **don't wonder** anymore because you just **confirmed it!**'

In all seriousness, back in March, I mentioned there are a couple of challenges of **preaching verse-by-verse** through a book—in this case a letter. **One** challenge is how the **thoughts fit together** and build upon one another. A **second** challenge is **how much time** to spend on each verse. As an example, I used verses 18-19. And now here's the quote: "Do I cover them **both** in one sermon—or spend **six Sundays** on wives being submissive—and **one Sunday** on husbands loving their wives?" I then added, "Be here in a few weeks and **you'll find out!**"

Although it has been more than a **few weeks**, the last time I preached from Colossians we covered Colossians 3:15-17—which means today we look at verse 18! **Steven Cole** wisely stated: "I know of no verse in the Bible that is as concise and obvious in its meaning and yet so controversial and difficult to apply practically as Colossians 3:18." (Bible.org, "[Lesson 24 Submissive Wives—Really?](#)" (Colossians 3:18)). To which I say, "Amen!"

For the sake of context, please follow along as I read Col 3:18-25. David Pao points out that in these verses (to include Colossians 4:1), there are **three pairs** of relationships: wives/husbands; parents/ children; and slaves/masters. (*Exegetical Commentary on the NT—Colossians and Philemon*, page 260).

**Pao** then makes this observation: "All three pairs begin with a call to submit...but in all three, the attention immediately shifts to 'the Lord'....For the corresponding members of the pair, the focus is on **their duties** to those who are submitting to them (vv. 19, 21; 4:1)."

In other words, you can't **overemphasize** the first—"wives submit"—but conveniently **under-emphasize** "husbands, love your wives." They are not "stand alone" thoughts—they go hand-in-hand. In fact, I would go so far to say that if **husbands loved their wives** like they are supposed to—**as Christ loved the church**—wives would have a much easier time submitting!

But—in my opinion—**the responsibilities** of wives and husbands in a marriage relationship are too **important**—and too often **misunderstood**—to only devote a **half a sermon** to each! So **each verse** will get a **whole** sermon—and I obviously won't be preaching **about husbands** on Mother's Day next week!

First, let's consider... **1. The mandate to submit**

A mandate, of course, is a **command**—and I'm calling it that because in the Greek it is in the **imperative mood**—meaning it is a command! It is in the **middle voice** which means that wives should **voluntarily submit** themselves to their husbands. We'll look at what that means in a little bit, but I want to first ensure we don't **hurry past** the obvious just because **it's obvious!**

So what is **the obvious**? What does it say? "**Wives**, submit yourselves unto your **own husbands**..."

--It **doesn't say**, "Wives, submit yourselves to **someone else's** husband—only your own!"

--And it doesn't say, "**Girls**, submit yourselves to your own **boyfriend!**"

--And it doesn't say, "**Fiancés**, submit yourselves to your own **fiancé!**"

--This command—this mandate—applies only to a **wife** and her **own husband**—period!

Why am I making such a big deal about this?

Because there are **men and women** that take liberties—and **make demands**—that in God’s sight are only permissible in the **marriage relationship!** And sadly, those **attitudes and behaviors** have found their way into the **teen** years, too! I’m going to **say it again**—but in a slightly different way—to make sure I am not being misunderstood.

--Young, unmarried ladies have **one man** they are to submit to—their Dad!

--And young, unmarried men are **not in authority over anyone** that is of the opposite sex—regardless of their relationship! In fact, young men are not even in authority **over themselves** because **God is their authority!**

‘Pastor, are you picking on the few young people that are here today?’ To which I reply, ‘Not at all! There might be 4 other people listening online! Not only that, sometimes these recorded sermons are shared with others!’

Next, let’s consider... **2. The meaning of submit**

So what does it **mean** to submit? It means to.....**submit!** It **doesn’t mean** to obey—like it says in verse 20, “Children, obey your parents”—that’s from **a different** Greek word.

But it does mean what we think of when we hear the word! It is translated from a Greek word that had a **military** connotation. According to the on-line **Blue Letter Bible**, it means: “to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader.” In **non-military use**, it was “a voluntary attitude of giving in...”

**Thayer’s Greek Lexicon** defines it like this: “to subject oneself...to submit to one's control; to yield to one's admonition or advice...” I’ll be explaining in more detail what it means throughout the sermon, but for now I want to address two questions.

A. Has the command expired?

The **short** answer—and **Biblical** answer—is “No!” There are people—and sadly, pastors—who teach that this was a **first century command** and no longer applies to us because we are “past that stage.” Anyone **have a problem** with that mindset—besides me? If we have a high regard **for God**—and for **God’s Word**—we should **all have a problem** with that kind of thinking! **Why?**

Because to believe that “culture” and “society” change to the point that God’s Word is **no longer relevant** is to say that the God who **knows** the future—and **controls** the future—didn’t **foresee** the future!

Here’s a second question: B. Are there exceptions?

And the **short** answer—and **Biblical** answer—is... **“Yes—there are exceptions!”** I’ll get into some specifics in a little bit, but for now I’ll just say this: a wife is not obligated to submit to her husband when he wants her **to disobey** God! **Acts 5:29** says, “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

Next... **3. The model of submission**

Wives, who is **your model** when it comes to submission? **Who**—in the Bible—do you look to as **an example?** It’s **not Sarah**—the wife of Abraham—and it’s **not Mary**—the mother of Jesus and wife of Joseph! The model of submission we need to look to is **Jesus Christ Himself!**

Notice on your outline **I Corinthians 11:3** “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the **head of the woman is the man**; and the **head of Christ is God.**”

I want to start with the end of the verse. **Who** is the head of **Christ?**

**God** is! So if God **the Father** is “the head” of Christ **the Son**, does that mean Christ **is inferior** to the Father?

No; they **are equal!** They are both 100% God—but they have different **roles!** **God the Son** took on the body of a man and came to earth to die—not **God the Father!** The point is this: just as God the Son **is not inferior** to God the Father, wives **are not inferior** to their husbands! **Wives** are not second-class citizens, they are not property, they are not servants and they are not slaves!

Women—just like men—are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). They were both “hand-crafted” by God—and they were both redeemed by the blood of Son of God! And that means both are **equal** in the sight of God!

**Matthew Henry** famously wrote: “The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”

But...God designed an **order** of headship—of leadership—in the relationship between husband and wife! We see that in the middle of the I Corinthians 11:3 on your outline: “...and the head of the woman is the man.” There are not **two** heads—there is only **one**. And God appointed **the husband** to be the head. It is a **God-ordained** role—not a **man-made** rule!

And **that** order—of man being the head—started **before** mankind fell into sin! According to Genesis 2:18, Eve was created to be a **helper** to Adam. **I Corinthians 11:9** says, “Neither was the man created for the woman; but **the woman for the man**.” Man was the head—the leader—before Adam and Eve both sinned.

We especially see Adam’s headship **after the fall**, though. Although **Eve** sinned first, God sought out **Adam** first—and **questioned Adam** first. Why? Because Adam was the leader—and God held Adam responsible as the leader!

Now let’s consider... **4. The motive for submission**

**Why** should wives submit to their husbands? Because **God says so!** And that’s really **the only reason** we should need! But...God gives us **another** reason here at the end of Colossians 3:18: “as it is fit in the Lord.”

There are **differences of opinion** as to what exactly that means, though. Some suggest it **limits** the scope of submission. In other words, submit to your husband **only when his will** lines up with **God’s** will.

Others see it as **motive** for submitting. It is fitting—it is proper—for **God’s people to follow God’s pattern** regarding roles and responsibilities within the home.

What I want us to do now is turn to Ephesians, chapter 5. Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus has a **number of similarities** to his letter to the church at Colossae—to include covering many of the **same subjects**.

But because Ephesians is a longer letter, some of those subjects are covered in **greater detail** in Ephesians than they are in Colossians. And that is certainly true when it comes to the husband/wife relationship! **In Colossians 3**, Paul devotes **two verses**. **In Ephesians 5**, there are **12 verses** about the husband/wife relationship—**13** if you count verse 21!

And it is here—in Ephesians 5—that we see... **5. The manner of submission**

**How**—in what way—are wives to submit to their husbands? Notice what it says in vs 22-24. What is the **manner**—the way—wives are to submit to their husbands? In the end of vs 22 it says, “...as unto the Lord”—and vs 24 says basically the same thing: the way the church **is supposed to submit to Christ**, wives are to submit to their husbands.

But what does that **mean**—and what will that **look like?** Notice again verse 24. The word “subject” in this verse comes from the same Greek word translated “submit” in Colossians 3:18. So how is the church—how are believers—to submit themselves to the **leadership** of Christ? **We should** obey Christ happily ... immediately...lovingly...and without questioning!

So does that mean wives should submit to their husbands in the same way? **No**; that is not what it means! Why is that the **wrong application** of verse 24? Because there is one **glaring, fundamental difference** between Christ and husbands: Christ is perfect—and husbands are not! And all the wives said, “Amen!”

What I want to do now is briefly share five “ingredients” (for lack of a better word) that need to be kept in mind as we consider God’s command for wives to submit to their husbands.

#### A. Attitude

What are some **attitudes to be displayed** if wives are to obey this command? There are several; I’m only going to mention two.

**1) Respect.** Look at the end of vs 33: “...and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”

Does that mean she is to bow down to him as if he were a king? No! **Reverence** in this verse means “respect.”

Peter uses the same word to remind wives to respect their husbands—even if they aren't obeying the word of God—in I Peter 3:2!

**2) Trust.** Part of submitting to the leadership of another person *is trusting* that they have *both* of your best interests at heart—not just *their own*. And it is certainly *easier* for a wife to have an attitude of trust in her husband's decisions if he has demonstrated in the past that he loves her—and wants to protect and provide for her.

A second area in which a wife can obey the command to submit is through... B. Actions

**1) The “don'ts.”** Are you showing your husband respect when you *criticize him* in front of others—or *talk about him* behind his back? Obviously not! Are you showing you *trust him* when you nag him to take care of things that he always has taken care of? Again, the answer is “no!”

**2) The “do's.”** Part of submission is not just avoiding what you shouldn't do—it is doing that which *pleases* your husband! Notice **I Corinthians 7:34** “There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may **please her husband.**”

Even without looking at the context, you can see from the verse that Paul is painting a contrast between an unmarried woman—and a married woman. What does a married woman *want* to do?

*Please* her husband! What will that look like? If your husband has a certain food that he likes, make it for him—unless, of course, it is bad for him health-wise!

Here are a *couple of personal examples*. Believe it or not, I have a “quirk” ...or two...or *twenty-two!* One has to do with toothpaste! It is not that I care *where* the tube gets “squeezed” from—but I do have “a thing” about *throwing it away* before it is empty! My wife *throws it away*, but I *take it out of* the garbage because I know I can *squeeze more out* of it than she can! Not too long ago—without us even talking about it—my wife came up with a win-win solution: she simply opens a new tube for herself—and leaves the other one for me to get 2 or 3 more brushings out of!

Here's a *more serious—and “spiritual”—example!* For our entire married life, my wife has handled our finances. Early in our marriage—when I wanted to give extra money to a missionary or special project—she wasn't always in favor of it. But as time has gone on, her trust in me—and more importantly, her trust in the Lord—has grown to the point that she doesn't “bat an eye” when I suggest an amount! And sometimes she has even suggested giving more!

### C. Acquiescence

What does it mean to acquiesce? It means to “give in”—even if you have some objections or reservations! Please know that I'm not talking about “submitting” to your husband when he wants you to *rob a bank* with him! What I'm talking about is that sometimes—even after talking it over and praying about it—you may still *disagree* about something like the kind of car—or house—you should buy. What then? The wife submits to the husband's authority—and doesn't “beat him over the head” if it later proves to be a mistake!

### D. Acceptable exceptions

Do wives have to submit to their husbands *no matter what?* Before you answer, notice again what it says in the end of vs 24: “...so let the wives be [subject to] their own husbands in every thing.”

Does in *every* thing mean in *every* thing? *No*; it doesn't! We must interpret Scripture with Scripture—and God does not contradict Himself! The wife *should not submit* to her husband if he wants her to participate in that *which is sinful* according to God's Word. Another exception is if the husband is *threatening violence*—or carrying out violence—against her or the children. Her obligation is to flee for safety—not submit to physical abuse! And she needs to call the police if he is a legitimate threat to the family!

Lastly, there must be an... E. Acknowledgement of the need for God's help

--Wives, is it *easy* for you to submit to your husband? *No; it's not!*

--*Why is it hard?* “How much time do you have, Pastor? I got *all kinds of reasons* why it's hard!”

Here are a few: Because he doesn't *love me* the way he should...and he's not very appreciative or encouraging...and he doesn't spend time with me...and he doesn't listen when I'm talking to him...and he doesn't finish what he started. I just read to you part of *my wife's list* as to why it is hard to submit *to me!*

--But none of those are the **real reason**—the root cause—as to why it is difficult to submit, are they?  
--The difficulty to submit stems from the fact that wives—just like husbands—**have a nature** that doesn't want to **submit to anyone**—even God Himself!  
--Wives, you need God the Holy Spirit to enable you to have the **attitudes of respect and trust**—even if your husband is not deserving of either!  
--You need God the Holy Spirit to give you the **desire to do the things that are pleasing** to your husband—even if he doesn't seem the least bit interested in pleasing you!  
--You need God the Holy Spirit to give you the **ability to submit to a decision** that you may not 100% agree with.  
--You need God the Holy Spirit to produce in you the fruit of the Spirit as found in Galatians 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, <sup>23</sup> Meekness, temperance...”  
--And you need God the Holy Spirit to enable you to speak a “soft answer that turns away wrath”—instead of “grievous words that stir up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).  
  
--Will God enable and empower you to do those things? He will, won't He? But we need His work in our hearts! Philippians 2:13 “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”  
--As two sinners with sin natures living in a fallen world, we have the opportunity to show the world the transforming power of God in our marriages!  
--Are we going to ask God to enable us to do that—and consequently bring glory to Him when He changes us—or are we going to make excuses?

So what would God have us do in light of what we've heard this morning?

1. First, **all of us**—not just wives—need to carefully consider this question: Have you submitted yourself to God's way to be forgiven—and become a child of His? There is only One way to become a child of God—and that is through Jesus Christ! (John 14:6); there are no exceptions!

And you need to have Jesus—you need to possess Him—not just know about Him!

Do you have the Son?

If you don't have the Son, you will spend eternity separated from Him in a place called Hell! Don't let that be you!

2. Second—if you are a child of God—God is our authority—and He has given us His Word to tell us how to live. He is the One who gave this command—not because He hates women, but because He designed us and knows what is best! So are you submitting to the authority of God's Word?

3. Third—are you relying on God to help you obey? God doesn't save us to “flounder around” in our sin! He wants to show Himself mighty in those who depend on Him—not in those who depend on themselves.