

THE ROLE OF MEN IN MARRIAGE  
COLOSSIANS 3:19

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

A grade school student some time ago was given an assignment to write a brief biography of Benjamin Franklin. The lad did his research and composed this brief but powerful masterpiece: **“Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston, but he soon got tired of that and moved to Philadelphia. When he got to Philadelphia he was hungry, so he bought a loaf of bread. He put the bread under his arm. He walked up the street. He passed a woman. The woman smiled at him. He married the woman and discovered electricity.”**

Many of us have also had the wonderful experience of marrying a woman and discovering electricity. While too many American marriages end in divorce and statisticians tell us that the average American marriage today lasts only 8.2 years, a recent survey from the Barna group says that 59% of US adults and 73% of Christians indicate that they are very satisfied with their marriage. (Christian Post, 6.18/2021)

Last week we focused on the woman’s responsibility in marriage. The perspective which I have taken is what seems to me to be the Biblical perspective. Unfortunately many Christians today have sought to explain away the clear statements of Scripture about the proper roles of men and women in marriage. In the broader culture these traditional views are regarded as archaic and even downright evil. Columnist and author Rod Dreher observes, **“Today, Christians who hold to the biblical teaching about sex and marriage have the same status in culture and, increasingly, in law as racists. The culture war that began with the sexual revolution in the 1960s has now ended in defeat for Christian conservatives.”** (*Christianity Today*, March 2017) While we may have lost the culture war, following the directions which we have been given in our divine owner’s manual will always be a benefit for us. It will also be a testimony of truth to the surrounding world.

Today we will focus on the husband’s responsibility in marriage. If it is tough for a woman to follow the Biblical pattern for marriage, it is in some ways even harder for us men to follow our responsibility. For the example we have been given to follow is Jesus Christ. We are commanded to love our wives as Christ loved us. A bit later I will give you the chance to make some practical applications about how husbands can more effectively love their wives.

The setting for this study is the Book of Colossians. We have seen from our series of messages on this brief New Testament book that the Apostle Paul was writing to a small church in a small town in western Asia Minor. What prompted his letter was news that there were false teachers in the town who were seeking to lead the Christians astray. So in the first two chapters of the book Paul deals with the basics of the

Christian faith with a special emphasis on the sovereignty of Christ. Now in the third chapter he turns to the practical application of that theology. In our section he is describing proper behavior in the three most important social roles in life: marriage, parenting, and work. Last week we looked at the wife's primary responsibility in marriage from #3 v. 18. Today we focus on the husband's primary responsibility.

I.

So let's look at THE COMMAND in v. 19 of #3.(PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE COMMAND) Paul says in the first part of the verse, "**Husbands, love your wives...**" In Ephesians #5, part of which Mac read for us earlier, the Apostle spends 3 ½ verses describing the responsibility that women have in marriage and 8 ½ verses describing the responsibility that men have in marriage. The reason for the greater attention given to husbands probably has to do with the cultural situation of the first century.

In the Jewish and Greek cultures everybody knew that women had legal, moral, and social responsibilities to their husbands. As I explained last week, the responsibility of wives who were Roman citizens was a bit more complicated. Their primary responsibility was to fathers. But when they had three or more children born to a husband, they became free from any legal responsibility to their father or their husband.

Husbands in all of these ancient cultures were generally regarded as having little responsibility toward their wives. Professor Douglas Moo writes, "**...no other [family] code we have discovered in the ancient world requires husbands to love their wives.**" (*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, p. 302)

Judaism had a higher view of the role of women in marriage than many of the other cultures, but still it was only the husband who had a right of divorce. Some rabbis said that the husband could initiate divorce for such a small thing as a wife overcooking a meal. So the command to husbands here was radical stuff.

As many of you know, there are three primary Greek words for love. There is *erotao*, from which we get the word "erotic." That has to do with physical love. There is *phileo*, from which we get the word "Philadelphia," the city of brotherly love. And there is *agapao*, or the noun form *agape*, which refers to a committed, sacrificial love. There is some overlap in the New Testament in the usage of *agapao* and *phileo*. But *agapao* is used most often to refer to a sacrificial love. Jesus said, "**For God so "agape-ed" the world that He gave His unique Son...**" (John 3:16)

The verb that Paul uses in our verse is *agapao*. He is commanding husbands to love with a committed, sacrificial love. He uses a present tense verb form which signifies that this is to be an ongoing love.

We will look in vain in this passage, or any other one in the New Testament, that places a restriction on a husband's love. "But I'm not in love with my wife anymore." "Husbands, love your wives." Biblical love is not primarily an emotional feeling. It is a commitment of the will. "But you don't know what a pain this woman is to live with."

“Husbands, love your wives.” “But she hardly makes any attempt at all to meet my physical needs.” “Husbands, love your wives.” “But you don’t know how she spends money.” “Husbands, love your wives.”

Psychiatrist Scott Peck says, **“Everyone in our culture desires to some extent to be loving, yet many are not in fact loving. I therefore conclude that the desire to love is not itself love. Love is as love does. Love is an act of will--- namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love. No matter how much we may think we are loving, if we are in fact not loving, it is because we have chosen not to love and therefore do not love despite our good intentions.”** (*The Road Less Traveled*, p. 83) Husbands, we are commanded to love our wives. We are to love them with intention and with action.

II.

Consider for a few moments THE REASONS (II. THE REASONS) for this command. There are certainly more reasons than this. But think about these three. **First**, a husband’s love for a wife is a natural result of the divine institution of marriage. In Genesis #2 v. 24 (GENESIS 2:24) God said, **“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”** Marriage is a mystical and sacred relationship--- between a man and a woman. This verse is referred to in the New Testament by both Jesus and Paul as the basis for the marriage relationship. In Ephesians #5 (EPHESIANS 5:28) the Apostle Paul quotes it and says, **“In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.”** If husband and wife are in some sense one flesh, then a husband ought to love his mate.

A **second** reason that a husband should love his wife has to do with the two deepest psychological needs of human beings. (PROJECTOR OFF) As I pointed out last week, men and women both have a need for security and for significance. On average men have a somewhat greater need for significance than women do. They need to know that their lives matter, that they have significance, that they count for something. Men naturally are bent toward competition and achievement.

On average, women have a somewhat greater need for security. They need to know that they are loved, that they are cared for, that there is some security for the future. If women are going to get pregnant, raise younger children, and manage domestic affairs, they need to have confidence that the husband will provide some security, that he will bring home a decent income, that he will not be chasing other women, that he will be there for the family. Women have a need for husbands who will love them.

Peter Kreeft is a Catholic philosophy professor. He says this about the state of affairs for women today: **“The average woman today does not expect a man to respect her. She expects a man to use her. She tolerates that to catch him and maybe make a marriage that will last. Expectations are incredibly low. It seems to me that it’s men more than women who today have to become knights and honorable. If enough honorable men stand up, that’ll be a quiet revolution. That ‘ll**

**produce stable families and stable children who will take over the world.”** (*World*, July 17, 2010)

A **third** reason that husbands should love their wives is that their love is an illustration of Christ's love for the church. In Ephesians #5 (EPHESIANS 5:25-26) the apostle writes, **“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, (EPHESIANS 5:27-28) so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives...”** Jesus is our example. A husband's love for his wife is a divinely intended illustration of Christ's love for the church. One of the purposes of marriage is to help us understand the nature of God's love for us and His relationship to us through Christ. A husband's love for his wife is essential to that understanding.

### III

Besides being a reason for the husband's responsibility to love his wife I also see Christ's relationship to the church as THE MODEL (III. THE MODEL) of what a husband's love for his wife should look like. Jesus had, and has, a sacrificial love for the church.

An early church leader by the name of Chrysostom interpreted the reference in Ephesians #5 in this way: **“Do you want your wife to obey you as the church is to love Christ? Then care for her as Christ does for the church... If you have suffered in this, you [still] have not done what Christ did, for you do this for one to whom you were already united, but He [did it] for her who rejected Him and hated Him... He brought her to His feet by His great care, not by threats nor fear nor any such thing.”** (John Chrysostom, Commentary on Ephesians 5:21-23)

Modern marriages are often based upon feelings of being in love. Editor and author Andrew Sullivan describes them as “the civic religion of romance.” He says, **“...thanks to the civic religion of romance, we constantly expect more and quit what we have in search of more. For the essence of romantic love is not the company of a lover but the pursuit.”** (*New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 2/11/2001)

Biblical marriages are based upon a commitment that we have made before God. The example of Christ's love for the church teaches us that our love for our wives is not to be based primarily upon our emotions. Christ's love certainly wasn't based on feelings, or the responsiveness of the object of His love.

At the Last Supper when Jesus knew that He was about to be arrested and crucified, the disciples were having an argument about who would be greatest in the kingdom. When they came into the Upper Room, no one was willing to do the humble job of washing dirty feet--- no one that is except Jesus. When they went out to Gethsemane later on, He asked the disciples to stay up and pray with Him. They all promptly fell asleep. A crowd sent by the Sanhedrin showed up to arrest Jesus. All of the disciples

ran away. Thank God that Christ's love for humanity was not based upon feelings and upon the worthiness of the objects of His love. Christ loved because it was the right thing to do, because it was His Father's will. Christ loved His unfaithful disciples and even those who were His enemies. It should not be too much to ask to love those whom we have chosen to marry.

In Ephesians #5 Paul goes on to explain that the sacrificial love of Christ for the church involves a goal. He desires to sanctify the church, to make it holy, so that it eventually may be presented to the Heavenly Father in all its glory. Christ desires to see the church become holy and mature and complete.

In a similar way when we husbands love our wives with a sacrificial love, we will focus on their needs and potentials and possibilities. Love will be concerned for their growth and maturity and well-being. Love does not mean manipulating them to meet our needs. It isn't satisfying them to keep them from complaining. It is doing what is truly good for them, helping them to become what God wants them to be.

IV.

In our verse in Colossians #3 Paul also makes a reference to THE DANGER (IV. THE DANGER) that is involved with a husband's role in marriage. After commanding husbands to love their wives, he says, "**...and do not be harsh with them.**" The original Greek verb means "to make bitter." It is elsewhere used in the New Testament of a physical sense or taste of bitterness or sourness. In other Greek writings it refers to rulership which is dominating and harsh. If men in marriage are going to be the leaders, they must not abuse that authority.

We face a temptation to be harsh when we feel hurt by our wives. I once had a husband I was counseling complain to me, "There is no one in the world who has ever hurt me as much as my wife has." My response was something to the effect: "Why should that surprise you? It is only people who are closest to us who are in a position to truly hurt us emotionally. People with whom we are not very close are not in a position to hurt us very much emotionally. The closest human relationship in life is marriage. So it should not be a surprise that something that a husband or wife says or does at a bad moment is likely to upset us the most." Obviously as good husbands or wives we should try to avoid wounding the spirit of our mates. But as sinful human beings we will sometimes blow it.

Paul's command to us husbands is that we should not become bitter or harsh toward our wives. How do we avoid bitterness? The primary way is to be quick to forgive. Bitterness develops when we let negatives, perceived or actual, build up over time. We keep a mental catalog of shortcomings in our wife. So we develop a hardness and a negative attitude toward our mate. We need to be forgiving toward our wives.

Closely related to this responsibility to forgive is our responsibility to communicate. Sometimes this bitterness builds up because we have not communicated with our wives about what is going on inside of us. She may not know what is bugging us or what has

hurt us. We let things build up. Situations can't be resolved if they are not discussed in a constructive way.

V.

So finally we come to THE APPLICATIONS. (V. THE APPLICATIONS) How can husbands be more effective in displaying love toward their wives? Today you have a chance to give some input about how husbands can do a better job of loving their wives.

While you are thinking about some of these things that husbands can do, or that you have seen them do, let me suggest one area for consideration. One of the books that I have used in premarital and marital counseling is entitled *The Five Love Languages*. (THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES) It was written by Gary Chapman, a Christian counselor who discovered that one key to successful marriages is having mates discover the love language of their partner.

This author found in his experience that there are five primary love languages by which people can express their love in marriage. In an effective marriage mates will work at discovering and using the particular language or languages that most effectively communicate love to their mate. He wrote this for both men and women. Since we are focusing on the husband's responsibility this morning, I will talk about his languages in terms of what we men need to understand about our wives.

The **first** language is words of affirmation. (LOVE LANGUAGES 1. WORDS OF AFFIRMATION) Mark Twain once said, "**I can live for two months on a good compliment.**" Some wives just thrive on compliments and verbal praises. My wife grew up in a family where her father gave a lot of verbal praise to her mother. So Suzy was used to hearing that. I grew up in a family where my father didn't give a lot of verbal compliments to my mother. He was a Swede, and Swedes are not known for being good at expressing their emotions. So I have had to work at expressing verbal praise toward Suzy, and I am still working on it.

The **second** language is quality time. (LOVE LANGUAGES 1. 2. QUALITY TIME) Some women measure their husband's love for them by the amount of quality time that they spend with them. All women need to have their husbands spend time with them. But for some women this language is at the top of the list. If you truly love me, you will spend time with me. This doesn't just mean watching TV together. It means talking and listening and giving her some attention.

The **third** language is receiving gifts. (LOVE LANGUAGES 1. 2. 3. RECEIVING GIFTS) Some women just thrive on receiving tokens of affection. Some women just eat it up when you give them flowers. Some love jewelry. Some love to get clothes. Some women like to fill their houses with knick knacks and souvenirs and gifts because these things just remind them of people who love them and particular stages of life when people expressed that love.

The **fourth** love language is acts of service. (LOVE LANGUAGES 2. 3. 4. ACTS OF SERVICE) Jesus expressed love for His disciples by washing their feet. Some women will feel especially loved and secure when their husbands do things for them around the house. For some women a husband who changes diapers some of the time, who takes care of the car, who does some vacuuming, who cleans up after meals, who takes care of the yard and/or who takes the kids to school is someone who is showing in the best possible way that he loves her.

The **fifth** language is physical touch. (LOVE LANGUAGES 3. 4. 5. PHYSICAL TOUCH) For some wives holding hands, hugging, and physical caressing are the sign to them that their husband really loves them. So we husbands need to figure out the language, or languages, of love that communicate love most effectively to our wives.

Now you have a chance to make some applications about how husbands can and do show that they love their wives. I realize that we have a number of people in our congregation who have lost their mates. Because of your years of marital experience, perhaps you can share wisdom for the rest of us. (PROJECTOR OFF)

There we have it, husbands, about how we can be good lovers of our wives. Cyrus was king of Persia in the sixth century BC. I read a story that he once discovered that the wife of one of his generals was guilty of a serious act of treason. The king sentenced her to die. When the general heard about this, he rushed into the presence of the king, fell on his face before him and cried out, **“O Lord, let me die in the place of my wife. Take my life instead of hers.”**

The Bible and secular history agree that Cyrus was a noble man. His response was: **“Such love as that is too beautiful to destroy by death. I will pardon her.”** The husband hugged his wife, who was present there, and said to her, **“Did you see the kindly expression on the king’s face as he granted you the pardon?”** She replied, **“I had no eyes for the king. I had eyes only for the man who was willing to die for me.”**

That is Christ-like love. That is the love, men, that we are to have for our wives. Husbands, love your wives.