

Wedding Sermon Study on Colossians 3:17–19

By John C. Jeske

The Epistle to the Colossians is one of the letters Paul wrote from captivity in Rome. He had learned that the Colossian Christians were beset and bewildered by gnosticism and by legalism. Other powers besides Jesus Christ were being proclaimed as mediators between God and man. The major emphasis of the epistle, therefore, is to point the readers to Jesus Christ as the Lord of eternity, the Creator and Ruler of all things visible and invisible, head over every power and authority, the one in whom all the fulness of Deity lives in bodily form, the one who has rescued us from the dominion of darkness. The short three-verse section from the epistle's third chapter lends itself admirably as basis for a wedding sermon.

Verse 17

“Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

“The name of the Lord Jesus” indicates the Lord Jesus as he has revealed himself to us. Doing everything in his name would therefore mean to do everything in harmony with his revealed will, doing everything for his sake, doing everything in dependence on his power, doing everything for his glory. When someone who bears Christ's name refuses compliance to his will, to that degree he renounces Christ's headship. If Christ is indeed Lord of all, then all of life, including the bride's and groom's new life together, is to be shared with him and dedicated to him.

If, however, a family is bent on self-satisfaction, with family members serving one another instead of the Lord Jesus, members of that family are going to have a wrong idea of life's goal. A topsy-turvy home is obviously going to send people out into the world who don't know which end is up in life. The overwhelming majority of people who have learned to know and to love Jesus Christ learned it in a Christian home. Christianity has made its march down through the centuries not so much through the efforts of pastors and churches as through the efforts of Christian husbands and wives, fathers and mothers.

“...giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Since we are acceptable to the Father only through the atonement of Christ, how fitting that we thank the Father not only for adopting us as his children but also for showing us how to live, for showing us that life works only one way, and that is God's way.

The sublime but very practical truth that Christ is the only all-sufficient Savior is now made the basis for application to several household groups, two of which are of special interest to us.

Verse 18

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

In their relation to God there is no male and female, but in their relation to each other the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. Any attempt to reverse this order is displeasing to the God who instituted marriage and regulated how it is to function. The submission (ὑποτάσσεσθε) asked of the wife is the correlative of the ἀγαπᾶτε asked of the husband. In God's design for marriage the wife submits and thus receives her husband's love. According to God's plan there are not to be two heads of the family.

“Submit” has no popular appeal. Many in our day will argue that it is undemocratic and unfair, denying a woman her basic rights. Many will argue that in our culture asking a wife to submit to her husband is unrealistic—and unromantic. But this is God's plan for the home. Such an attitude on the part of the wife “is fitting in the Lord.” The wife's compliance with God's expressed will for her in marriage is a form of worship.

She does that “in the name of the Lord Jesus”—for his sake, by his help, according to his will, for his glory. Eliminating “obey” from the marriage ritual does not eliminate it from Colossians 3:18.

Verse 19

“Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.”

“Husbands, love...” (ἀγαπάτε). One of the tragedies of our day is that love is being defined for us by people who themselves don’t know what it is, who can’t even distinguish between love and lust, and couldn’t care less. The kind of love God asks husbands to embody is first of all, a *purposeful* love, which seeks to serve the beloved’s deepest needs. A husband loves his wife not primarily because she is an attractive female, but because she is a daughter of the Most High. What he wants most for her in marriage is to help her find her way to her place around the throne of the Lamb. In the second place, a husband’s love is an *unselfish* love, which seeks not so much to get what she has as to share what he can. In another epistle Paul urges husbands to “love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). God’s design for the husband, as head of the family, is to live always for the woman God has given him, with a love like God’s own self-sacrificing love. He will show his love by honoring her, by promoting her welfare, by seeking to please her.

We hear much about “entitlement” today, about human rights. St. Paul has precious little to say here about either spouse’s rights in marriage. He doesn’t tell husbands to rule, but to take the lead in loving. What binds spouses in holy matrimony, then, is not simply affection, being in love. The ἀγάπη for which Paul calls here describes an attitude of the inner self by which one person becomes responsible for another and by which he makes the other person a concern higher than himself. Again, the husband’s acceptance of his role is his divinely appointed way of seeking what God wants. He will strive to fulfill his God-given role “in the name of the Lord Jesus”—for his sake, by his help, according to his will, for his glory. A harsh, high-handed husband (just as surely as a rebellious wife) corrupts life and will undermine a marriage.

“Love!” “Submit!” “Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus!” “Who me?” we ask, and laugh inwardly, because we know our sinful weaknesses all too well. We know the gap that exists between what we are and what God has called us to be. Is this all Christ offers—a set of high standards for marriage, a list of rules nobody can keep? Christ offers not only good advice, but good news. Not a new leaf, but a new life! Not your power, but his! Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, seeking his will, saying with Paul: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Php 4:13).

These thoughts may be combined in the following outline. The truths of the text are arranged synthetically.

The Three Ingredients of Holy Matrimony

I. Love (v 19)

- A. God calls husbands to love purposefully, unselfishly (Jn 3:16; 1 Co 13)
- B. This love moderates and motivates the husband’s exercise of his leadership.

Transition: St. Paul speaks some words which can be understood only by a mature person, v 18.

II. Maturity (v 18)

- A. God’s will for wives (ὑποτάσσεσθε) may seem unfair, unrealistic.
- B. But God asks wives to submit in order to receive the husband’s love. In God’s plan, the wife lives her life in free self-giving love to a spouse whose love for her is a reflection of the love of God. Her role is not to compete with man but to share his life and his love, and to enrich it.

Transition: No two people, despite all their good intentions, can make a success of marriage.
Another ingredient—a Person—is needed.

III. *Jesus Christ* (v 17)

- A. Christ alone can make a marriage a success, a house a home (Ps 127:1; Jn 15:5). The bridal couple's good intentions, sincere emotions are no adequate guarantee of a stable marriage.
- B. The spouses' relationship to each other in marriage will pretty well be determined by their relationship to Jesus Christ.
 - 1. Trust his forgiveness;
 - 2. Seek his glory;
 - 3. Rely on his strength.