

Colossians 3:19 The Christlike Love of Husbands

This morning we are coming back to our section on the family in Colossians 3. And what we're looking at here is how a Christian conducts themselves in the family. When a person comes to saving faith in Jesus, repents from their sin is therefore a new creation in Christ Jesus it affects every area of their lives. There's no such thing as a cafeteria Christian who gets to pick and choose what commands they want to follow. No, when we call Jesus "Lord" we are saying we are the slaves, he is the Master, and he calls all the shots.

And that transformation also affects how we live life in our families. God actually has told us how he wants us to live out our Christian lives in the family context. We're not left in the dark on that and God is not vague with what he expects. He doesn't answer every question, of course. But we do have principles by which we can understand how he wants us to live.

And we are called to these standards whether or not others in our household are Christians. If your wife is not a believer, you're still called to love her. If your mom is not a believer, you're still called to obey her. So it goes. Each of these commands are independent from the other in the sense that the whole household does not have to be Christian for people to obey these commands.

Last week we looked at the godly submission of wives. This week we look at how husbands are to love their wives and not be harsh with them.

And what we see in this passage is that husbands have a key role in the home. God has designed us to lead. Actually, I like how the NIV breaks down this section with each verse on a different line because it's easy to see that Paul is addressing everyone in the household: Wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, masters.

What's interesting is that, depending upon the household, the husband could be addressed up to 3 times. Paul addresses men as a husbands, as fathers and as masters (or a husband could be a slave). Not every husband has all three of these roles - sometimes it is just 1 or 2 - but for many it's all 3. And when it is, the weight of responsibility increases.

God has designed husbands to set the direction for their family, to lead their family, And if we're honest we are often very bad at that very thing.

So what I want to do is look at this passage in reverse order. I want to consider what it means to be harsh with our wives first, and then look at what it means to love them.

1) Do not be harsh. **Read 19**

Usually when we think of harshness we probably think of a harsh tone or words. Barking at someone, an angry reaction, a snide comment. Side: husbands, I think if we simply treated our wives as well we treat as the cashier at JC Penney's we might be in really good shape. Sadly, we often treat complete strangers with greater respect and dignity than our own wives. And we'll talk more later about our words, but what we need to know here is that the Greek word used here is deeper than simply harsh.

Some of your translations say "do not be embittered against them." And I like that translation because I think it really gets to the issue. The issue here is not **just** harsh words. The issue here is a heart that is **bitter** toward our wives. A heart that views our wives as the enemy. A heart that thinks we have to battle our wives, insult our wives, demean our wives, yell at our wives, give silent treatment to our wives, or make them look foolish in order to get what we think is best.

Gentlemen, this is the real issue Paul is getting at: when we no longer view our wives as our God-ordained helpers through covenant, and instead look at them as our enemies. When we see them as hindering us from getting what we really want in life. When our wives seem like a drag on us, holding us back.

And listen, brother, you might have a difficult wife - Christian or not. A wife who doesn't submit when do try to gently lead. A wife who opposes you at every decision. A wife who is proud and never admits wrong, never apologizes or asks forgiveness. A wife who is cold and closed off and not affectionate. Some of that might just

simply be her sin and what she's going through. And just like it's hard for a wife to submit to a bull of husband, it can be hard to love a difficult wife.

But can I suggest that sometimes - many times - that as husbands there is a lot of blame that falls into our lap? It's our own foolish pride and bitterness and arrogance that makes marriage difficult.

This word harsh or bitter is an interesting word. When it's used in other contexts it's often used as the chief of all sins.

You remember Simon the magician in **Acts 8**? It seems like he's a believer, seems like he's following God. But then he tries to purchase from Peter the ability to control the work of the Holy Spirit. He doesn't really love God, what he loves is power. Peter calls him out: "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" (**Acts 8:23**). When a person thinks he can use God to get glory for himself, it's the gall - the bile or excrement - of bitterness. When we try to use our wives just to get what we want it's the same thing: the gall of bitterness. It's actually a form of personal hatred or contempt for them because we are treating them as a tool.

Bitterness also stems from unforgiveness.

Eph. 4:31: Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Bitterness also comes from idolatry - failing to love God or harboring sin in our lives. Specifically, gentlemen, it's used in regard to sexual sin.

Heb. 12:15-16: See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled...

Roots of bitterness undermine the grace of God. They defile people - that is, sin begets more and more sin. And they cause trouble for everyone. When we are bitter toward others we are withholding grace.

Now there are a lot of reasons we could be bitter against our wives and therefore harsh with them. We could be caught up in secret sin. Maybe they've greatly sinned against us and we're struggling to forgive. It could be a lot of things. But let me just give you 3 common things that I see that often fuel bitterness. Maybe you see other ones, but this is what I commonly see.

1) Husbands forget that the mission of our lives is our wife.

There is a classic situation that happens between dating a woman and marrying her. We spend all this time focusing on her, doing things with her, delighting in her, winning her heart, learning about her.

And then we get married and it's like "Alright, now life really begins. What's the next goal? What's the next thing to conquer? We'll do it together!" And having goals and doing other things isn't bad, but it's missing the main point.

It's like someone saving and saving for the car of their dreams. Then they get the car and love it and go on road trips. But they never change the oil. They never wash it. They don't get regular maintenance. Tires are bald, trash is everywhere, there's check engine lights on but they ignore them. The car has gone from the object of their affection to just a tool to get to where they want to go. And they're irritated at the car because isn't what they thought it'd be.

This is often what happens in our marriages. We forget that our wives are to be the object of our love and affection and that our goal is to ever increasingly learn about them and love them. And it's easy to get distracted by things that are good, but not the best.

Your house doesn't need to be the biggest, nicest, most well-maintained. You don't need the best job, making gobs of money.

Listen, your kids don't need a big inheritance, big house, sports opportunities, so on. You know what your kids really, really need? Your kids need to see you loving your wife deeply. Sacrificing your desires for your wife. Defending your wife. Backing her up. They need to see you challenging anything that would come against the honor and dignity of your wife. They need to understand that, while you love them, they're just passing through and the relationship and friendship you're investing in is her. And your kids need to see appropriate marital affection. You say: "We don't have a lot of affection." It's probably because you're not doing all the other stuff that has to be in place to get you there.

It's when we think the goal in life is winning, that we lose. It's when we think the goal is financial success or making sure our kids get the best sports/education/music/job/whatever. It's when we think the goal is having the best stuff, best vacations, best toys that our marriages suffer.

Prov. 17:1: Better is a dry morsel with quiet, than a house full of feasting with strife.

Bitterness often comes because we forget that our wives are our focus and our mission.

2) The second way bitterness creeps in is when we long for greener pastures.

What I mean by that is when we start wishing our wife was someone else. We wish she was more attractive or more hospitable or more outgoing. Maybe we wish she liked the sports we like or movies we like.

Maybe we wish she was more mature, more godly, more organized. Or maybe less tight with money or more extroverted or maybe that she wouldn't stay so long talking with people after church. Really what want is someone who is more like us! And we want that because we think we are the standard of goodness.

You know, the irony here is that ladies often struggle with the exact same thing. They wish their man were more godly, more organized and so on. And the problem for everyone is that bitterness creeps in when we focus on what we don't have rather than on what we do have.

It's interesting that in the OT idolatry is often referred to as adultery. It's cheating on God. It's thinking that Baal or Molech or Asteroth will give you a better life than Yahweh. In that way idolatry is adultery. But adultery is also idolatry. It's coveting someone other than who God has put you with.

Matt 19:6: Jesus said: What God has put together let no man what? Separate.

God has put you and your wife together. All your sin, all your baggage, all your hangups, all your strengths, all your weirdness - and let's be honest: we're all weird. God has put us together to sanctify us and grow us and glorify him.

And we need to repent from worshipping some wife or husband that does not exist - or does exist and is not ours - and instead focus on loving and committing ourselves to the person we married.

3) We view marriage as a 50/50 compromise.

I once had an unmarried friend who was talking about marriage with my wife and I many years ago. And he was talking about how he thought a good marriage is it's 50/50 - everyone doing their part. And that sounds good at first.

But I just kind of sat there quietly. And he looked at me and asked: "Is that not right?" No, it's not right. Marriage is not 50/50. When you make a marriage vow you're not vowing to 50/50 or even 100/100. You know what you're vowing? 100/0 You are vowing that you will give 100% all the time without any obligation on the others' part.

Here's usually the problem: We start making a mental tally of all the things we're doing and a tally of all the things they aren't doing. And pretty soon it seems lopsided. Like we're doing everything and they're doing nothing. They're not pulling their weight and we get bitter.

Can I tell you something? Marriage means that you are called to do everything even if they are doing nothing. I tell people in pre-marriage counseling: If your wife falls off a cliff and is bed-ridden for the next 60 years of your life, you will hold to your vow and you will love her and wait on her hand and foot til death do you part. You love whether weight is pulled or not. We vow marriage in sickness and health, richer or poorer, better or worse, forsaking all others, till death do us part.

The mental list of what we're doing and they're not also doesn't work because we usually fail to honestly point out our own deficiencies and their strengths. Rarely is our evaluation of what we do and they don't an honest evaluation. We're just trying to pick a fight.

You know what else? if list-making is happening on your part, it's usually happening on her part, too. Rarely do I sit down with a couple to talk about marriage issues where the husband has a list of grievances and the wife is just sitting there going "Golly, I didn't know you did so much and I do so little. I'll try to do better." No, you know how it usually goes? They get out their little portable filing cabinet and read chapter and verse of all they do and everything the man doesn't do.

Listen, if you're making lists, you've lost before you started. You might as well tear up the list. And really, what you probably ought to do is starting apologizing for things you know you're not doing and thank her for the things she is doing. Can you imagine a household where the husband only ever focused on how helpful his wife is, apologizing for his own failings and where the wife only ever thanked the husband for what he did and apologized for her shortcomings? That's a home that's filled with gospel love.

You know what that house would be filled with? Love. Husbands don't fuel things that cause bitterness in your marriage.

2) Second thing: Husbands love your wives. **Turn to Eph. 5:22-34.** We're going to spend the rest of our time here because I think nowhere else in the NT do we get a clearer picture of what it means that husbands love their wives. I want to just walk through this. **Read 22-24**

We saw this last week where marriage is really a living breathing display of the love between Christ and the church. The husband is like Jesus, the head. The wife is like the church, who submits to the lead of Jesus. I want to just point out 2 things here:

First, the husband is the head of the wife, just like Jesus is the head of the church. No one disputes that Jesus is the head of the church. When someone is the head of something they are the source of authority. The head of state, head of a company, head of household, so on. It's the source of authority. The head directs where the body goes. So God has ordained that men are the head.

Men, this is not optional for you. If your wife is leading the household, if she's calling the shots and running the show because you won't step up and lead her, you need to put your big boy pants on and be the leader that God has designed you to be.

You need to be involved in your family, you need to know what's going on financially, you need to know what's going medically, you need to know what's going on spiritually. And you need to take responsibility. When you stand in judgement before the Lord Jesus for your household - and you will stand before him - it's not going to be enough to just shrug your shoulders when he asks you about why things were going on and try to pawn it off on your wife. That won't work.

And husbands, let me just caution you: if you haven't been doing this, this will be a tough process. This is going to be, "Honey, I'm sorry I've been out to lunch on the financial stuff. I'm so sorry that I haven't been doing what I need to do, will you forgive me? I want to be more involved can we work on this together." Because if you just swoop in there and try to take over with money or the kids or whatever when you've been absent, it's going to be a train wreck. It's going to be a slow, slow, slow, slow process.

And wives, if your husbands want to be more involved in these things, gently give them space to lead you.

The second thing here is that the role of husbands is to lead, but notice **Vs. 23. Read**

Jesus was the Savior of the church. Husbands obviously don't save their wives, but the role is still similar. Husbands, our leadership is to be specifically for the rescue and welfare and eternal spiritual good of our wives.

Let me ask you this: If someone comes up and asks your wife, "Who's the most godly man you know?" Deep down inside, what do you want her answer to be? It should be you. It better not be me, it better not be Andy, or any other guy in here.

Do you understand that your dedication and devotion to Jesus directly affects your family? For good or for bad. Obviously your devotion to Jesus needs to be primarily about seeking your own satisfaction in him, loving him. But your devotion will have an effect on your family. Or your lack of devotion will have an effect on your family.

Even if you're a new believer or haven't been leading or don't know a whole lot of theology, you can be the godliest man your wife knows. Are you dedicated to reading the Word, praying as a family, saturating them with love for Jesus?

You are the head and as the head your goal is to be for the spiritual good. Paul makes this even more clear in **Vss. 25-27. Read 25-27**

The marriage relationship, if done right, is almost hard to even fathom because it almost seems circular. Here's how it works: Imagine a wife who joyfully, willfully, continually submits to the lead of her husband. And yet the husband joyfully, willfully, continually leads for the very purpose of loving his wife. Do you get that? The wife submits to her husband so that he can love her even more.

And the husband loves his wife with the goal that she will become more and more like Jesus. Jesus gave himself up to sanctify the church. He is the head - the supreme authority over the whole universe as well as the church - and his whole ministry for the church was give himself up for the church to sanctify her that she might be presented in splendor! Spotless, radiant, glowing in holiness because he has cleansed her with the water of the Word.

Husbands, are our wives glowing in holiness because we gently wash them with the Word? That means 2 things. First, you actually have to open the Word with your wife. And I'll tell you from my own experience that if you have never done this it can be very, very tough. But it is essential.

And second, when you do open the Word - the Bible - with your wife whatever else gets accomplished it should gently cleanse her. Your wife is inundated with the world, the flesh and the devil all day every day and God expects you to be actively involved in her sanctification by gently washing her off with the Word of God. That is exactly the imagery he uses. **Read 25-30**

Husbands just like you should be nurturing your own body with the water of the Word of God, you are to nurture your wife with that same water. Through marriage you are one flesh - you are spiritually united together until death do you part. And if you are one flesh, you need to treat her like she's part of you.

Parents, you know how sometimes kids need reminders when they go to shower about what they need to clean? Because sometimes they forget an area? Can you imagine talking to an adult friend or co-worker who refused to wash the left side of their body? It's not that they forgot, they just didn't. Would you say they were doing good or harm to themselves? Probably more harm than good.

Guys, our wives are not our enemies. So far from being our enemy, God says they are part of us. One flesh that we are to care for and nurture with the Word of God. **Read 31-33**

Most of us know that Christian parents are called to train up their children in the Lord. It's the job of parents to teach the children about Jesus. When you get married that responsibility transfers from the parents to the husband. A new family unit is established, and the cycle begins again.

Husbands, our one job in life is to do everything in our power and our ability to present our wives holy and blameless and perfect in Christ.

God is not concerned about how much money we make, though we need to go make it. God does is not concerned about how nice our car is, how big our house is, how fat our retirement is, how many vacations we go on, how many sports our kids are involved in. Our one job in life is to present our wives as radiantly, beautifully godly in Christ. That is our one job.

You say: I haven't been doing that and I don't know how. The first step is to repent. To apologize for not doing it and ask for forgiveness. The second step is to pray. Pray on your own for your family and pray together with your family. Before meals, before bed, when something big comes up, when something small comes up. Pray. And third, is read the Bible. Start small: 5 minutes reading through the gospel. We do several things at our house, but an easy thing to incorporate is just reading for 5-10 minutes after dinner. The Word of God can be your dessert. If you want other ideas I put some books you can get online.

You say: Jason, I've tried this before and she doesn't respond when I try to lead. If you've been married for 20 years and haven't been doing this, I'm gonna tell you right now it's gonna be rough. You're going to need to be patient, and gentle consistent, and persistent. You're going to want to start very small and stay with it.

Ladies, if your man hasn't been doing this be gentle and encouraging. Guard your own heart from bitterness as he attempts to lead.

Marriage isn't easy, is it? But the beauty is that is is a display of the most glorious truth there is: the love that Christ Jesus has for us. The mercy he shows to us despite our sins, our failings and our weaknesses. May our marriages show that love more and more for his glory.

Pray