



Sermon – August 1, 2021
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Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 3:18 - 19

Well, as you grab your seats, let me invite you to open your Bibles to Colossians 3, verses 18 – 19. See, last week we had a sermon about worship, this week we got to put it in practice, didn't we? It was so good to turn our hearts to the Lord. And speaking of our discussion about worship last week, I want to give you an update about where we are in our plans for our worship minister search. So one of the exciting things we've had some great opportunity to make some progress on our interim plans. And already now, the next two and a half or three months we've got faithful leaders ready to go every Sunday morning whether from within our church or some guest leaders who have connections to Central or College Station or to Texas A&M or somebody on our team. And we're going to continue to have incredible worship from week to week. But I also want you to know how we're going to start the process for the worship minister search. Because we're ready to begin pressing play on that. In a normal search for filling one of our staff member roles, it normal has three phases. We start things off with the staff search phase where our team goes through resumes and looks at candidates, narrows them down to a primary candidate, and brings that then to the second phase, which is our evaluation phase. Where they meet with the search committee, perhaps our deacon, or in this case our worship ministry to just make sure there's a mesh with who this person is and our church. Before finally we'd come to the entire congregation for a vote of affirmation to receive them onto our team. And all three of those dimensions will be part of our worship search. But we know that finding our next worship minister is such an important and complex task that we're going to add two additional layers on the front end of that process. The first one, which is already going on right now is a listening phase where myself and our team are engaging with people around the church to just hear your feedback on how we're doing in our worship ministry and what we should be looking for and where we're going next in that regard. In addition to that, in the early stages of our search, we're going to ask a search firm to partner with us to help us identify some candidates and do some of the initial vetting. Provide some additional musical expertise for us so that once we are able to establish a solid batch of candidates, then we can move through our normal process where we go to that step of our staff evaluating and then bringing it in front of you as a congregation to take a look at before ultimately bringing it to a vote. Now this is a process we've been working on within our team, we've talked about it with our personnel committee and our deacons and I'm excited to see where the Lord takes us next. And while we begin that journey, I just want to ask

one key thing of you even now. Would you commit to pray for this process? Pray for our team as we search. Pray for our search committee when they get involved. But most of all, pray for the man that God may be raising up next, even now, to open their hearts to join us for this next season of worship. Because what we saw last week in Colossians 3, verses 16 through 17 is that our worship is not just in our singing on Sunday mornings, but it's a lifestyle. And it's a lifestyle where we are called to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. And what's interesting is that after Paul finishes talking about how we should do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, he's going to show us some specific arenas where we must put that into practice. And the first one we're going to notice this morning is in the area of marriage.

I know marriage is a hard topic to discuss in a church like this because I'm sure when I look around the room that there are people in here who might be single, or who have gone through a divorce in the past. Maybe right now you're living in a messy marriage or you've experienced abuse or trauma in this. And so there is deep pain that you might feel as we discuss this topic. On the other hand, I know that there are those of you in thriving marriages where there is deep joy. And there's a reason that there's such a spectrum when it comes to this subject. It's because marriage is a part of the fabric of how God designed the world. Because in every marriage, there is a glimpse of the Gospel that takes place. And I want you to see the way that Paul speaks about this reality now beginning in Colossians 3 in verse 18. Notice how he says it.

¹⁸Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we turn our hearts to Your word, we pray that we would turn away from all else. And I'm praying especially for those in the room who may be struggling in their marriages who may come in here with a limp in that relationship, Lord, that You would use this moment, Your word, Your Spirit, to draw us to Yourself. To show us our need of the Gospel for our relationships. But most of all, to give us a picture of the marriage relationship You have between Christ and the church. And we ask these things in His name. Amen.

I was doing an outdoor wedding not long ago and about 15 minutes before the service, the guy who ran the venue came up to me and said the words that no minister wants to hear right before the ceremony starts. "Hey, pastor, I just wanted to let you know we have a problem." Now I'm thinking, did the bride run away, is there some sort of issue. Well, this was an outdoor wedding and all the chairs were set up under this canopy of trees that were vaulted over the top of these chairs. And we were standing at the back of it and he said, "Well, you see this chair over here?" Which is about halfway down on the left side. I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, right up there in that tree on one of those limbs that's hanging over the seats, I've been keeping my eye on it. There's a snake up there." I was like, "Yes, I think we do have a problem. We need to figure out a plan here." He said, "Well, I'm going to go and find something so I can take care of it. I'll be back in a minute. You keep an eye on it." Well, I had never spotted it at any point in the process so I wasn't sure where it was or where it was going. But by the time he gets back, he can't find it. It's moved. And so we're searching all over the place because the clock is ticking. And I'm just imagining some scenario where I'm in the middle of the ceremony and this snake falls from a limb right on the mother of the bride and all this pandemonium breaks out. Well,

he's searching and searching and finally he locates it and this snake must have realized that something was going on. Because it was making its escape as quickly as possible through, not on the ground but through the canopy of the trees. Crawling from limb to limb to get away from that moment. And right there, there was a serpent lurking at the start of that marriage union. And what we find all across Scripture is the same warning for each one of us. That there is a serpent of old who from the beginning in the Garden of Eden is standing against marriage, against family, against the home. What the Bible is showing us, especially in this text today, is that marriage is not just a covenant relationship; marriage is spiritual warfare. And if we want to find lasting victory, if we want to live in a way that's pleasing to God in that covenant relationship, we need to do it in the way that Paul calls us to. So think about what's happening in this text. Paul has gone from general instructions, now he gets very specific and he is speaking about life in the home. Now this is something that was common in that ancient time period for ethicists and philosophers to give instruction about the home. But what was different about Paul is that rather than putting the head of the household in the center of the home, instead he puts Jesus at the center. And he shows us that if we want to walk with Christ in our marriages, then the Messiah needs to be at the center of our marriages. And what we're going to notice this morning as we work our way through this text is that as Paul discusses the Christian home, what he's going to show us is that there are two keys to a thriving marriage. And we're going to see the first one back in verse 18 when he tells us that marriage thrives through trusting wives.

So notice how he says it there.

¹⁸Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

And we know this. Every relationship thrives on trust. And that's especially true in marriage. And Paul begins here starting with the role of the woman and gives her an instruction, to submit to her husband. So what does that submission mean? Well, before we answer that question, let's talk about what submission is not. Submission is not passivity in the face of aggression or abuse or abandonment. Submission is not giving up your identity. Submission is not silencing your voice. Submission is not throwing away your passions. Submission is not some submission of an inferior to a superior. That's a different picture than what we find in Scripture. In fact, you see the word of God praising this Proverbs 31 woman who wouldn't match that reality at all. I remember sitting in a wedding a few years back and the pastor, when he got to a text about wives submit to husbands, he said, "You know, when it says submit, what that really means is love. Just an interchangeable word for love. That's all he's saying there." He wanted to explain away this difficult reality in Scripture that is beautiful in God's design. Submission and love are not the same. They both need to be there, but let's not explain away God's design for marriage. It's not simply love, but what is it? When Paul says, look back at the text, wives, submit to your husbands, what does he have in mind? It's not to love, but to trust. The essence of submission is trust. In the original language, the idea of this word is to place yourself under the authority of someone else, to trust their leadership. It was often used in a military context for a soldier under submission to a commanding officer. That's the image there. And this isn't some foreign idea to us. We do this type of trust through submission all the time. Every time you step on a plane, you're trusting that pilot in submission. Every time you walk in a building like Central, your trusting the construction is an act of submission. Every time you walk into the doctor's office for that diagnosis, you are trusting that doctor in an act of submission. And what Paul is showing us here is that uniquely in Christian marriage, wives are called to embrace that trusting demeanor.

So if we were to boil down a definition of submission, here's what I'd offer to you this morning. Submission is when a wife is wired to trust, honor, and respect her husband in such a way through her attitudes and actions that it leads to the flourishing of the home. It's a disposition. A wiring to trust, honor, and respect a husband through attitudes and actions that leads to a flourishing in the home. And when we see Paul speak about it here, this is not a posture that we reluctantly embrace, but instead one that we should joyfully display. Because in that reality, we are picturing the relationship between Christ and God. That though they are equal, Christ submits His will to the Father so that He can honor Him with His life; even going to the cross on our behalf. The question that every wife in this room faces this morning is, will your posture in your home be one of suspicion or submission? You know the difference between the two? Suspicion believes and assumes the worst about somebody. Submission believes the best. Suspicion resists. Submission respects. Suspicion tolerates. Submission trusts. There's a difference in the posture that we have towards our husbands in these settings. And Paul is calling us to that posture of trust. And who is it the wife is supposed to submit to? When you look back at the text, he's very specific: to your husbands. Not to any man in any situation, but to that one man that God has brought you together with. And you may be looking at me today and saying, "That's easy for you to say Phillip. You don't know the situation I'm in. You don't know what he's like. You don't know what I've been through." And you're right; I don't. But you know what I do know? Paul was writing to a church at Colossae filled with new believers likely in messy situations. People that he is giving this instruction to thousands of years ago were in similar situations to you. And I don't see an asterisk next to this reality. This call to trust is one that he is laying in front of wives to carry out faithfully. It's not a call to naivety. It's a call to trust in a discerning way. And the only time that we should step aside from that submission to a husband is when it is in direct violation to submission to God. When he pulls you towards sin, when he puts your safety in jeopardy, when he is not seeking your best but seeking your harm, God is not calling you to submit in those moments. He is calling you to submit to Him instead and trusting that He will sustain you. And so the question you might be saying, "Well, what about me? Because my husband doesn't even know the Lord. Am I supposed to submit to him as well?" And I'm sure there were Colossians in the room as they heard this letter wrestling with that same reality. And the answer is, yes. That unless and until your submission to your husband puts you at odds with your submission to Christ, the call of the gospel is to trust. And that's exactly why Paul is, Peter is reminding us in 1 Peter 3 of the way that the submission of a wife to an unbelieving husband may be part of what God uses to open their eyes to see their need of Jesus. That disposition to trust should be wired into the lives of women in marriage. Now why is that? Why would Paul and God call us to do that?

Well, look at the second half of verse 18 when he tells us the reason. He says, as is fitting in the Lord. That word fitting is the picture of what's proper or right or appropriate in a context. He says, this is right in the Lord. Every marriage fits a paradigm. It might be the paradigm of what a couple grew up with in their own home, that healthy marriage they saw or that disastrous divorce they watched play out becomes the pattern for the way they live. For others, it might not be their childhood. It might be the culture around them. And they just watch the way the others live and assume that's the way that they should live and they embrace that reality. But Paul gives us a different pattern. He gives us a different picture. The fit that we are looking for is a fit that is in the Lord. He uses this phrase, for times, in Colossians. And as we discussed last week, each time it represents the presence and power of Jesus in work in our life in a specific arena. It's fitting in the Lord for a wife to trust her husband because in that reality, it is giving us

a glimpse of the picture of the way the church is called to trust Jesus Christ. To live in submission, in honor and respect for the sake of the calling that God has placed on their lives. And that, that idea of marriage and trust being fitting in the Lord is exactly why I cannot wait for next Sunday. Because next Sunday night is when we're going to kick off a brand new marriage enrichment ministry right here at Central called Re-Engage. And if you haven't heard of Re-Engage, it's a semester long marriage enrichment ministry that's designed to pour into you and your spouse to help your marriage thrive. So I wonder if we gave an anonymous pop quiz this morning, and those of you that are married in the room, if I ask you to give your marriage right now a grade like you were back in school, what grade would you give it? What would it be? For some of you it might be an A, things are going great. For others, it's like a B minus. You're just mired in mediocrity but you've become complacent. And for others, it might be a D minus or an F, it's on the last leg. What I want you to understand is this, marriage enrichment ministry, Re-Engage, is for everybody across the spectrum. What we want to do is meet you where you are and help to see you make it an A by the power of the Spirit. Because Paul is saying, if we want our marriages to thrive, the only way it happens is a trust that comes through the Lord. And as you hear this, men, I hope you don't file this away and say, "Here's my spiritual trump card in the home." Because this is not a trump card, but an invitation. The stakes are being raised for you as husbands and fathers. Because if God is placing in your wife a wiring to trust you as the leader of the home, guess what that means? You need to lead in a way that's trustworthy, in a way that she will respect and desire to honor. It is elevating the expectation which brings us to the second reality that Paul speaks of here in verse 19.

If we want our marriages to thrive, we need to recognize that marriages thrive through loving husbands. So look at how he speaks of it there.

¹⁹Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

One of the amazing things Scripture shows us is that men and women are beautifully distinct. That we're designed to be different. We are equal in essence, but different in role in the church and in the home. And as we look at this reality, he is showing us in marriage that he loves, she respects. He leads, she trusts. So if the primary role of the woman in marriage is a trust expressed through submission, the primary role of the man in marriage is a love that is expressed through sacrifice. Look at how he says it there.

Husbands, love your wives,

What kind of love is this? Well, the first thing you need to see is it's an uncommon love. When he uses that word love there, it would've been totally different from the other ways that ancient writers would have spoken about the home. His audience would have expected to hear in this moment, "Husbands, rule your household. Rule over your wife." But instead of that picture of rulership, there is this picture of love. It's an uncommon idea back then and even today. Where the call that Paul is placing on men is one where we are designed not to demand or to dictate or to dominate. Instead, we're to dedicate our lives for the delight of our family. That's uncommon, even back then, and especially today. And it's seen in that word love. In the original language, *agape*, this idea of self-sacrifice for the sake of others. We've seen this showing up over and over again in the letter to the Colossians. The idea for you husbands is that your role in the, not just in the church but in your home, is not to be served, but to serve. There's

a couple named Jeff and Sherry Nabors who met years ago when her garage door broke and he happened to be passing by in the neighborhood. He stopped and helped her fix it and that sparked the start of a relationship that when one moved away, they did by distance for a period of time. As their relationship grew closer together and they moved towards marriage back in December 2020, they started talking about getting married and having that wedding together. They were looking for an intimate wedding venue. Maybe a small chapel or something like that. But they ended up settling for a far more intimate venue than that. It was Jeff's hospital room as he laid there struggling to live suffering from the complications of COVID. They knew he was approaching death and in that moment they decided they wanted, even if it was for a short time, to be married. So they called the hospital chaplain, there was not processional, no wedding dress, no string quartet or wedding cake. As a matter of fact, when it came time to say, "I do", Jeff was so weak, he couldn't even speak. He just nodded his head. And she slid a ring on his finger, makeshift ring made of hospital bandages. That marriage only lasted four days until he passed away. Why would a couple do that? Why bother? You know this guy's almost certainly going to die. What difference does a few days in this marriage, it doesn't even seem like it makes any sense. And that's at the heart of what Paul is speaking of here when he talks about the uncommon love in marriage. It defies norms. It overcomes expectation. It is marked out by this deep-seated love to give yourself for another, to reflect something deeper about the way God is at work in the world. Then he is calling us to an uncommon love.

But notice the way he also calls us to an undivided love. When you go on in the text, it tells us there, who should husbands love? It says, love your wives. Remember, if you look back in Colossians 3:14, he's given us the command already to put on love. And he tells us as husbands, one of the first and primary places, one of the main arenas where you get this opportunity is in your relationship with your wife. To pour out your life for their sake. And that undivided love means that your love for her is at the exclusion of a love for any other woman. That your love for her should be paramount in your life after your love for the Lord. Would you say this morning that you've got an undivided love for your wife? As deer season approaches and you make a few runs out to fill that feeder. As those work projects just never slow down now that the economy's picked back up and you've got to squeeze one more project in before you go to bed. As your children compete for your time and focus and love and affection. Do you have an undivided love for your wife? Does she feel prized above all of your other earthly relationships? See, Paul is calling us here to this kind of undivided love, where we will not give our soul to another on this earth. That first it is to God and then we pour ourselves out in earthly relationship to her and we do it not just through an undivided love, but notice the way the text ends, through an unwavering love. That's why he says there in verse 19, do not be harsh with them. That word harsh in the original language means to make bitter. You know that bitter taste that you get in your mouth when you eat a certain type of food? There can be a bitterness that comes in the home. And the author of Hebrews warns us in Hebrews 12:25 that we should be careful that no root of bitterness takes root in our hearts because it will cause trouble. And if there is any place that is true, harshness can harm the home. There's a reason for that. It's because hard hearts often have harsh tongues. You know what happens over time in marriages. You start growing layers of resentment over top of each other. It's like sediment settling to the bottom of the ocean floor and calcifying. It callouses our hearts. It hardens us towards one another where grievance after grievance forms. And so over time, we begin to take things personally that are not intended to be personally. And your lack of love you display towards her leads to her lack of trust in response to your leadership and you find yourself in this vicious cycle

you don't know how to escape from. You may feel trapped right now in a cycle like that. But Paul says in the midst of that pull towards harshness that there is a call towards humility. Now there are two types of people in the world. And you can know them by the way they handle things whenever they see the check engine light come on in their car telling them they need an oil change. There are some of you that are probably just like my wife who the moment that light comes on, she's going to adjust all of the things she's doing and get that taken care of as soon as possible. The rest of you are like me who the first time you see it you say, "Ah, that's probably a fluke. I'm sure it'll change the next time I start the car." "Ah, I'm checking the sticker on here. I really don't need an oil change for a little bit longer. I can make it a bit further." There's a reluctance in somebody like me to do the preventative maintenance that's responsible for caring well for a car. But whether it's right away or later on, you finally show up to that oil change and you get that car taken care of. The mechanics that are there or the people that are also waiting on their cars to be done, guess what, they're not looking at you saying, "Oh man, this car must be in bad shape. He's brought it in for an oil change. Can you believe that?" No. What are they doing? They're saying, "This is someone who cares about the proper functioning of their vehicle, who wants it to work well, and is willing to invest the time and energy it takes in order to see it thrive and to perform in the way it's intended. And I can't help but wonder this morning if there are those in the room who have not been willing to put in the time in preventative maintenance for your marriage. If I can take a step of vulnerability with you this morning, even I have a tough time with that in my own marriage. But one of the things I'm so grateful for is that in the over a year that we've been here, Cami and I have taken a step to experience some marriage counseling together as a couple. That during our transition into this role and processing through the grief of the loss of my best friend John, we just wanted to make sure we're doing all we can to work our way through those realities so that our marriage can continue to thrive. And if that's a step your pastor's willing to take, you think I'm some super Christian? That our marriage, we've always gotten together? We're just right here in the battle with all of you. And that's one of the reasons we want to launch this Re-Engage initiative. It's so that we can come alongside you in that preventative maintenance and to help you grow. Because here's what we know. When Paul speaks of marriage here, he is not just speaking about the proper picture for what an earthly marriage should look like. Of course he is speaking about trusting wives and loving husbands. But as he does that, he is giving us an additional picture. That when we look at these earthly marriages that thrive, they give us the best image, the best picture of Christ's relationship with the church. That as we submit to that husband, we are imaging the way the church responds to in submission to Jesus Christ. And as that man embodies a love for his bride, it is giving us a picture of the cross where Jesus went even to the point of death. To die in our place so that He might ransom a bride for Himself. That's why it's so fitting that we come to this text about marriage on a Sunday we're having the Lord's Supper. Because as we partake of the supper in just a moment we are experiencing a wedding feast with our Bridegroom. And as we prepare to ready our hearts for that, let me just remind you. The reason we do this is that when we partake of the Lord's Supper, we don't just hear the Gospel proclaimed, we taste and see that it is good. We do that once a month in our church. We come to the table and we invite you to this family meal. If you know Jesus, if you're walking with Him as a baptized believer, this is for you. And I want to remind you. As the response song plays, we will come to these tables and grab the elements and go through that process whenever the song concludes. And as we prepare our hearts for that, I want to read these words over you. They come from Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 when he speaks to us about examining our hearts before we take of this family meal. Here's what he says.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself then and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Let's pray together.

Father, in this moment, I pray that You would ready our hearts. That the broken body that we are about to partake of in this bread will remind us of the way that Jesus suffered even to the point of death on the cross. That sacrificial love that You have called the husbands in this room to embody. And as we partake of the cup Lord, as we're reminded of His shed blood for our lives, Lord, I pray that You would wash us clean, set us free, fill us with Your Spirit so that we can walk in the newness of life You've already given us in Christ. That would show up in ways that transform our relationships, even those that are deepest, like marriage. And I'm pleading with you now, God, that if there are marriages in this room that may be in crisis, or maybe stuck in complacency, that You might use today, Lord, by Your word and Your Spirit to awaken them with the desire to thrive in the way that You tell us can be true by the power of Your Spirit. We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.