

# Christ in Me

## Marriage in Christ

March 8, 2026

Colossians 3:18 - 4:1

## Introduction (Title Slide)

If you're joining us for the first time, we have been working our way through the book of Colossians (just 3 more weeks to go), and what we've learned is that this letter is all about the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus.

To say Jesus is **supreme** means there is nothing above Him, nothing outside His rule, and nothing beyond His reach. Jesus holds the first place in every realm — creation, the church, and redemption. His power is unmatched, His rule is uncontested, and His name is unequalled.

To say Jesus is **sufficient** means nothing has to be added to Him. He lacks nothing; He needs no supplement. Everything required for our salvation, our growth, our hope, and our endurance is fully found in Him. He is enough — not just to begin the Christian life, but to define it and sustain and complete it.

And while I was away at weight gain camp these last two weeks, John and Eric showed us from Colossians 3:1-17 how Jesus' supremacy and sufficiency impacts our identity and our personal behavior or morality. Paul now moves to our relationships in the home. The gospel impacts our marriage, our parenting, and our work. Today, I'm going to focus on marriage. Next week, we'll talk about parenting and working.

## Prelude

Now, before we really dive in on marriage, let me just briefly speak to the different people we have in the room here.

- Some of you **aspire to be married**, and you will be one day. Today's text and message will help you have some biblical expectations when that day comes.
- Some of you are **not married** (single, widowed, divorced), and that will continue. Today's text and message are still for you because of what Christian marriage actually is (more on that later).
- Some of you are **Christians who are married**, which means the message should be a great encouragement to you.
- Some of you are **not Christians who are married**, which means you will have an opportunity to learn a bit more about the work of Jesus and how that defines Christian marriage.

## Body

So let's begin by looking again at the passage and then we'll break it down in the time that we have remaining. (Slide)

**18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and don't be bitter toward them.**

## Context Matters

Right out of the gate, we are confronted with the enormous cultural gap between our culture and what Paul was writing to and from 2000 years ago. What Paul says here was radically different to that culture's view on marriage, and it is radically different to our culture's views on marriage. But the secular, cultural convictions of marriage then are different from the secular, cultural convictions of marriage now. I'm not here today to lecture on context, but we can't ignore these things either if we want to understand and apply this text to our marriages today. Remember: the Bible can never mean what it never meant!

### Biblical Context

So let's think first about the context into which Paul wrote. There were likely Jewish couples, Roman couples, and Greek couples in this early church in Colosse, and all of them grew up thinking and acting very differently about marriage. (1 slide)

- **(Jews – covenant & fidelity)**. For the Jews, marriage was sacred and hierarchical. Marriage was a partnership of duty, fidelity, and family honor under male authority.
- **(Roman – order & respectability)**. The Romans brought a little different slant. Roman marriage was more utilitarian. It was about maintaining social order with male dominance.
- **(Greeks — duty & utility)**. Greeks had their own slant too. For them, marriage was a duty to the city-state as well as one's own lineage.

All of these worldviews and practices are positively impacted by the gospel. While there is value in understanding marriage as a duty ... or understanding its usefulness at a societal level ... or valuing how marriage contributes to a long and healthy lineage ... none of those things are to be the definitive values of a marriage.

### Our Context

I think you could make the case that there are even more competing views about marriage in our culture today. (Slides as I say them)

- **Marriage as Self-Fulfillment**. Marriage is often seen as a personal fulfillment project. It's a way to "find your happiness," "be your best self." It's your chosen means to achieve emotional satisfaction. "You complete me." (Jerry Maguire)

- **Marriage as Co-Independence.** Marriage is viewed as a partnership of equals functioning largely independently: two careers, two emotional lives, shared logistics, etc. This sounds like a mix of individualism and the ancient Roman view to me.
- **Freedom Marriages.** Cohabitation, open marriages, or legal marriages that aren't practiced (upside pineapples, Pablo Picasso)
- **Hyper-Traditional Marriages.** ("Trad-Wives"). There is a renewed subculture that idealizes a 1950s-style domestic order (homemaking, submission, male financial leadership, etc.).

These worldviews and practices are also positively impacted by the gospel. Christians are not permitted to compartmentalize their views on marriage separate from the work of Jesus. Who Jesus is and what He has done changes ... sanctifies ... marriages.

How so? Look at the text with me.

***18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and don't be bitter toward them.***

## Husbands and Wives are Equal Partners in Christ

The first thing that I want you to see from the text (slide) is that **husbands and wives are equal partners in Christ.**

In this text, three things are really quite astonishing.

- **Paul addresses** the wives directly.
- **Paul addresses** the wives first.
- **Paul commands** husbands to **love** their wives.

Any one of those things communicates the equality husbands and wives have, so certainly all three in 2 sentences affirms that in Christ, husbands and wives are equal partners.

Across the different cultural and ethnic backgrounds into which Paul was writing, marriage was patriarchal and utilitarian. But "in the Lord," marriage becomes something very different. The women are seen and treated as equal partners in the marriage, and husbands actually have to love their wives (something unnecessary and unlikely in Paul's day).

So, Christian marriage is not patriarchal (centered on the man), nor is it matriarchal (centered on the woman). Christian marriage is just that: CHRISTIAN. It is centered on the life and work of Jesus. And in so being, both the husband and wife are equal partners in the marriage.

## Equal Status, Complementary Commands

Though husbands and wives have equal status, they have complementary commands. Look again at the text.

**18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and don't be bitter toward them.**

So you can see the two complementary commands. Wives submit, husbands love. But let's focus first on how these two are similar. (one slide, 3 points)

- **Both reflect the gospel.** Submission reflects the Church's responsive faith. Sacrificial love mirrors Jesus' giving of himself for the Church. Together, this communicates redemption.
- **Both require self-denial.** Submission denies the impulse to control. Love denies the impulse to dominate or neglect. Each replaces self-assertion with self-giving.
- **Both aim for unity and flourishing.** Paul's vision for Christian marriage is harmony under Christ's headship. The outcome of both commands is a relationship marked by peace, dignity, and joy.

Yet submission and sacrifice are different things. Let's look first at submission.

Submission (slide)

The Greek *hypotassō* means *to arrange oneself under, to yield willingly, to give deference in love*. It's an act of voluntary humility—not weakness, but strength under control. It's fundamentally about attitude and posture: honoring another's leadership as unto the Lord.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, in Paul's day, the cultural norm was patriarchal, and in that society, wives submitted to their husbands. Christian submission is not the same as submission demanded by patriarchy. Patriarchal submission is coerced—rooted in hierarchy, male privilege, and the assumption of female inferiority. It reduces the wife to property or servant.

By contrast, Christian submission is voluntary, dignified, and reciprocal, grounded in the believer's devotion to Christ. In this verse, Paul uses *hypotassō* in the middle voice—meaning the wife chooses of her own will to align herself under her husband's loving leadership as is fitting in the Lord. Her submission is an act of discipleship, not subjugation; it flows from her identity as Christ's equal and co-heir. Done "in the Lord," it cannot justify abuse or silence her voice. Instead, it reflects Christ's own willingness to serve (Phil. 2:5-8).

Love (slide)

Patriarchal culture gave husbands authority, but Paul transforms that power into responsibility: the husband's leadership is expressed not through dominance but through sacrifice.

Christian love, as commanded in Colossians 3:19 and Ephesians 5:25 (and others), goes far beyond affection or duty—it is patterned after the self-giving love of Christ for His church. This love (*agapē*) carries no hint of privilege or control; it is the deliberate surrender of one's rights for the good of another. To "love your wife" means to cherish her welfare above your own comfort, to speak and act with gentleness, and to protect her without stifling her. It forbids bitterness,

resentment, or any form of harshness, because a man who knows himself loved by God must extend that love to his wife.

### Submission and Love (slide)

When taken together, the wife's submission and the husband's love form the heartbeat of a truly Christian marriage. They are not opposing duties but complementary expressions of the same Christ-centered humility. The wife yields herself in trust, and the husband pours himself out in service; both bow before the same Lord. Where patriarchal systems chase control and modern individualism demands autonomy, the gospel charts a better way: mutual self-giving shaped by the cross. In this harmony, neither spouse loses dignity—each reflects Christ in a different but equally sacred way. The wife's willing deference and the husband's sacrificial devotion meet in the same act of worship, showing the world what love looks like when Jesus stands at the center of the home.

## Conclusion/Application

### Marriage is a Window to the Gospel (slide)

Congregation, do you see how the gospel informs the marriage relationship? Do you see what's distinctive about a Christian marriage? Marriage was designed by God to be transparent, a window through which the world catches a glimpse of the gospel. In the unity of husband and wife—two distinct persons becoming one—God gives a preview of the final union between Christ and His church and, ultimately, of all things brought together under His headship. When a marriage reflects sacrificial love, humble submission, forgiveness, and grace, it points beyond itself to the redeeming love of Jesus. A healthy Christian marriage doesn't make people say, "What a great couple," but "What a great Savior." Its purpose is not self-fulfillment but revelation: to make visible, however imperfectly, the glory of the gospel in everyday life.

### Beware the "Christian" Patriarchy (slide)

We must beware of any teaching that clothes male dominance in Christian language and calls it biblical order. What some label "Christian patriarchy" may sound pious, but it often smuggles the world's thirst for control back into the gospel's language of love. When voices claim that men alone should represent their families in the voting booth or that women's compassion disqualifies them from leadership, they are not defending Scripture—they are distorting it. The New Testament does not teach that women are spiritually or intellectually inferior; it proclaims that both men and women are created in God's image and redeemed by Christ's blood. True headship does not silence or sideline women; it cherishes and honors them as co-heirs of grace. Any "Christian" message that reduces women's dignity contradicts the very heart of the gospel, for our Lord's authority was never about subjugation but about service. A Christ-centered home, church, or society will not be ruled by fear or hierarchy, but by mutual honor, shared responsibility, and love that imitates the One who stooped to wash feet.

## Bring the Gospel to Bear on your Marriage

### For Wives: Submission in Everyday Practice (slide)

Christian submission is not silent passivity but an active expression of faith and partnership. This means choosing to honor your husband's leadership with trust instead of competition, to speak truth with grace rather than resentment, and to seek unity rather than control. Submission is the daily decision to serve the relationship rather than self-interest, to measure words by whether they build peace or deepen division. It means listening, respecting his perspective, praying with him, and joining him in seeking the Lord's direction for your home. It is the gentle strength of a woman whose security is in Christ and whose confidence allows her to yield without fear—because she knows that her worth is not diminished by her willingness to love sacrificially.

### For Husbands: Love in Daily Action (slide)

For husbands, loving your wife as Christ loved the church means translating affection into actions of care, humility, and sacrifice. It looks like listening before speaking, valuing her insights as equal to your own, shouldering burdens you might prefer to ignore, and continually asking, "How can I help her flourish?" This love rejects the urge to dominate or withdraw when disappointed. It means serving your wife's good at cost to yourself, using authority not to control but to protect and nurture. In the rhythm of daily life, it's choosing words that heal instead of wound, choosing patience over bitterness, and choosing presence over pride. The measure of a husband's love is not found in how well he is obeyed but in how well he serves—because love that mirrors Christ always kneels before it leads.

(Title Slide)