

# Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

## Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

*The Christian's Experience – Putting On: Sanctified Relationships (3:18-25)*

### **A Sanctified Marriage (3:18-19)**

**18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.**

In 1 Timothy 4:12 we read words that are often cited to our young people as being a worthy, God-glorifying goal for their lives. We read:

**Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.**

While I have no problems with encouraging our youth to be just such an example, the context of this verse is an older mentor/teacher, the apostle Paul, writing to his younger disciple, the pastor named Timothy. And while Timothy was younger than Paul, we are inclined to believe that he was most likely in his mid to late 30's, maybe just a few years younger than myself. And the reason why I point this out to you is this, the Scriptures are constantly calling God's people, in whatever capacity they serve in, be it a pastor, an employee, a spouse, a parent or even a child to strive to be an example to others; but not just an example of anything; not simply an example of goodness, or wholesomeness, as important as those things might be, but more to the point, an example of Christlikeness. Our lives are to be constantly progressing toward looking more and more like Christ in both conduct and character; a process we call sanctification.

This all ties in to our study in Colossians 3 because, as you recall, Colossians 3 is all about looking, acting, and being influenced less and less by the world and looking, acting and being influenced more and more by Jesus Christ. The beloved prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon once noted, “*Nearness to God brings likeness to God. The more you see God the more of God will be seen in you.*” Our lives are to be increasing reflections of the glory of God. No believer ought ever to be content with the dimness of his reflection of God's glory, but always striving to polish the glass that is his life so that the light of God might shine all the more brightly. This was in fact Paul's point in Colossians 3:17 where we read,

**Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.**

Everything that we say, every action we perform is to be looked upon as an opportunity to honor the Lord Jesus Christ, to point people to Him and to His word, to magnify Him and present Him to others as Lord and Savior. And it is upon this premise, that all that we do is to bring Jesus glory; that all we do is to be but reflections of His character and conduct, and that in all that we do that Jesus is to come to have first place in everything (Colossians 1:18); these are to form the basis and govern all our relationships; from the most intimate of marriage to the more broad between employees and employers. Last week we began looking at verses 18-19, noting that this most intimate of all human relationships, in fact the very first of human relationships that of marriage, is to be a portrait of this premise; of becoming more and more Christlike in our behavior. We also noted that the purpose of such a relationship as exists between a husband

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and a wife is to serve as examples to both believers and unbelievers of what it means to be living for Jesus. And so I submit to you once again that the point of verses 3:18-4:1 is that all of our relationships are to be seen as vehicles through which Christlike character and conduct is to be learned and exemplified. As believers in Jesus, we have no relationship in which we cannot learn and practice sanctification.

So then, do not forget as we look at these verses, that Paul is not simply seeking to communicate how wives and husbands, and children ought to interact with one another; but he is also pointing out how in each of these relationships a person has the opportunity to reflect Christ; to put into practice the Christlike qualities outlined just a few verses above our text in Colossians 3:12-14;

**12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.**

And so, when Paul begins this section with the wives saying in verse 18, **Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord**, we are not to simply see this as a call to wives to “to willingly give themselves to the direction and will of their husbands in an attitude of dependence” but additionally and more to the point as a means of revealing the very character of Christ to their husbands, to their children, to their church family and to all who see their lives. And the quality Christ that wives are called to strive to exemplify is that of submission; of yielding to the stated order or chain of command as ordained by God; not to be a doormat; not to be ignored or neglected, but to strive to know and carry out the will and desires of her husband even as Jesus was committed to knowing and carrying out the will of God. Where the husband is striving to know and live to the will of God, this becomes the most ideal and delightful soil in which a wife may blossom with God’s glory and be an example **in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show[ing] [herself] an example of those who believe (1 Timothy 4:12).**

This then is the summation of last week’s consideration and now, this morning, we move on to the call and exhortation to husbands, reading in Colossians 3:19;

**Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.**

I cannot impress upon you all, not just husbands, but each and every one of you that these words are speaking to us all. If we believe 2 Timothy 3:16-17, namely that: **“16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work”**; then we must believe that whatever this says to husbands directly has also a purpose and meaning for every believer from the youngest to the oldest, married or single. So then, let us look at this portrait of husbands and discern what lessons we find in this picture of Christlikeness for all of us to practice.

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## The portrait of husbands: Love

*Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.*

Here we have the portrait of husbands; a picture of love. Here Paul addresses the husbands of the congregation and presents to them a straight-forward command, **“love your wives.”** What honestly first caught my attention with this command is what Paul didn’t say to these husbands at Colossae. When hearing such a command, most of us are more accustomed to hearing it from the letter to the Ephesians, where in Ephesians 5:25 we read a more extended versions of this statement, **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...”** Why does Paul leave out this profound statement in his letter to the Colossians? Beloved, context. The letter to the Ephesians is emphasizing order in the church and the headship of Christ in the church. There the emphasis is that husbands are a reflection of the headship of Christ and the sacrificial nature of that headship; that being a leader is not about serving yourselves and your whims but for providing for the needs of those in your charge even as Christ provided for the church. We have a different emphasis in Colossians 3:19. Let us consider some aspects of what it means for a husband to love his wife in this context.

### 1. It is a sanctifying love

First, it is a sanctifying love. Here in letter to the Colossians, we have a more simple command that what is found in Ephesians 5:25, **“Husbands, love your wives.”** While this yet carries with it some of the very ideas from Ephesians 5:25, you already know Paul’s point in Colossians 3:18-4:1. Paul is not stressing the headship of Christ and His order for the church here but rather Christlikeness in and through all of our relationships. And whereas wives have the unique and special call to picture the dependence of Christ upon the Father and His general attitude of submission; husbands have the unique and special call to picture the love of Christ upon His people. In other words, as a husband learns to excel in Christlikeness, he has been given the special task of modeling and exemplifying the love of Christ in his love and affection for his wife. This love is to be demonstrable and evident for his wife, his children, the family of God and others to see.

But why “love”? Why is the husband called to love his wife? Are there not plenty of unbelievers who love their wives? I agree that unbelieving husbands can and do love their wives, but not with a biblical, God-glorifying love. The kind of love that God calls husbands to is not a natural love and therefore cannot be naturally generated. The kind of love God calls husbands to requires a work of grace and is therefore supernatural. The natural love of the world is inherently selfish and while it may lavish affection upon a woman, the base motivation is that these things are done in order to get something that satisfies the man. And that is in the most ideal case of worldly love. In the vast majority of marriages, and even in many Christian marriages, the husband tends to withdraw from his responsibilities toward his wife and if given the opportunity, will give way to someone else filling his wife’s needs so that he can follow after his own self-centered pursuits. This is why Paul exhorts, **“Husbands, love your wives....”** In effect, Paul is stating, “As demonstrations of Christ in you, give yourself to the benefit of your wife.”

### 2. It is a radical love

But it is more than just a sanctifying love, we must also come to see what Paul is calling husbands to as radical. To understand this command, we need to know what marriage was like in the time of Paul. When Paul penned these words and they were first read to that congregation

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in Colossae, it was understood that Paul was calling the husbands to something *radically* different than they had been taught or had experienced. How do we know this? How do we know that this was a revolutionary statement? Beloved, Paul might have used a more common word for love in this text, at least one more comfortable to the Greek and Roman mindsets. This more common word for love is “eros.” This particular word is never used in the Bible, but was certainly the norm of what passed for love at the time of Paul. What is “eros” love? Eros is a totally human kind love – driven by the senses, why what is seen, felt and experienced. It speaks most often of sexual love, as the English word “erotic” implies. We can define “eros” as the giving of affection to another in order to receive affection for ones self. This kind of love may well involve a genuine feeling for someone else, but such a feeling is kindled by the attractiveness of that person and by the excitement, pleasure, and satisfaction which we believe that person will grant us. Thus “eros” masquerades as love for someone one, but it is actually love for oneself. This kind of love says, “I love you because you make me happy.” The basis of this love is found in some characteristic in the other person that pleases us; things like beauty, charm, warmth, kindness, or talent. But if these qualities are removed or lost, then there is nothing left, and this love dies. Let me stress, eros love is most concerned about what it can get and so it will give, but it gives as little as possible in order to get the greatest return. And if it gets little or nothing in return, this love turns into resentment, bitterness, or hatred.

I think I just described the love that we most often see and experience in the world. But Paul uses a different word, one that is more familiar to us, at least in theory, than it was to the Colossians, and that word is “agapeo”. Paul did not say, “Husbands, “eros” your wives” but rather he said, “Husbands, “agapeo” your wives” – that is; be thoroughly and devotedly committed to every aspect of your wife’s well-being. Let me give to you again my expanded understanding of the idea of this “agape” love husbands are to exemplify to their wives: Agape love is...

*“a one-way, unconditional and continual decision of the will, a decision that affects both one’s actions and affections, that seeks the highest good for another, regardless of the cost and all for the glory of God.”*

And bear with me as I explain this definition of love a bit; love is **a one-way** [starts with me – “Husbands, initiate this love], **unconditional** [not to love in order to get something from the other; not manipulating in order to get what I want; not loving if the other does this or that; but simply ministering to the other’s needs] **and continual** [it is not wax and wane but be never ceasing] **decision of the will, a decision that affects both one’s actions** [what I do to demonstrate this love] **and affections** [my emotional bond and attachment], **that seeks the highest good for another, regardless of the cost** [regardless of my personal needs, wants, desires being met; even to the cost of my reputation or pride] **and all for the glory of God.**

Such a selfless, serving, giving type of love without thought of return was totally foreign to the marital lives of Greeks and Romans. In the day of Paul, women were generally thought of as property. It was not unusual for wives to little or no part in the social activities of their husbands. Her place was “at home” taking care of his children while many men of the day indulged themselves in the sensualities of the day. In general, husbands and wives did not even eat meals together. It is in this atmosphere that Paul gives this command; a radical, unheard of exhortation

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that said in essence, “Put the needs and cares of your wife before all else.” Men came first in that culture, but here Paul is saying to put the wife first.

This is why following such a command was a reflection of sanctification, of becoming more like Christ, because it rejected the culture’s thoughts and expectations of marriage and adopted an attitude that was radically different from the culture. Oh that husbands and men in the church would set the standard for being radically different from the world. <sup>[slide 11]</sup> As A.W. Tozer once stated: “*Pure Christianity, instead of being shaped by its environment, actually stands in sharp opposition to it.*” The point of our text is this; that the example every husband is to be to his wife, his children, to his church family and to the world is that of total Christlikeness in contrast to the worldliness; to thinking and acting like the world. And how does the husband stand in such opposition to the world? He does it by loving, by practicing this “*agape*” love toward his wife. Any person, who walks through the doors of our church, ought to see husbands, in their relationship to their wives, as models of the love of Christ; a model of radical love that is to be put into practice among all the members of the body.

### 3. It is a committed love

But what does it mean to love radically? What does this look like? I would say that the next picture of love we need to consider is that it is thoroughly committed. The husband has the opportunity in marriage to be a prime example of the love of Christ; a love that gives himself for his bride. It is a love of sold out commitment to seeking the very best for his bride. It means that the husband is looking for every opportunity to best meet the needs of his wife. Husbands, words like “I promise to love you, to comfort you, to honor and keep you, in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, in sadness and in joy, to cherish and continually bestow upon you my heart’s deepest devotion, forsaking all others, to keep myself only unto you; and to keep you useful to the kingdom of God; from this day forward until death do us part or the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” are not just to be thought of at the wedding or on an anniversary; they are everyday commitments to your bride. And even as Jesus Christ is so committed to us, so husbands are to strive to exemplify this love of Christ to all through their relationship to their wives.

### 4. It is a prioritizing love

Next, we must learn that this love is a prioritized love. The truth is that no man can be so committed to his wife this if his interests are improperly divided. He must set her as a priority. No husband can comfort and cherish his wife if he does not take time to talk with her and to listen to her. It is as husbands focus their attention on their wives that he begins to see his love for her increase, and for the Christian wife in particular, she will begin to blossom and flourish and become a great delight to her husband. Is this far-fetched? What about work? What about hobbies? What about friends? Great, have them, enjoy them to the glory of God; but never forget that your first and primary relationship is with your wife! Even as Jesus poured all His energies into cherishing the church, husbands are to be known for pouring themselves into the lives of their wives. The time spent in such focused attention increases the husband’s capacity to love his wife and bring to the wife great satisfaction and delight in her husband. As we read in Proverbs 5:18-19

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**18 Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. 19 As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love.**

Was Jesus loving His bride a duty or a delight? We know it was both. He “gave Himself” for the church. Jesus gave Himself for His bride so that His bride would become radiant with the glory of God. That is the goal for the husband so that by that example we might all long for seeing one another radiant with the glory of God. I cannot imagine Jesus giving Himself with grim resignation or merely out of duty. It was with an unselfish heart of love that Jesus gave everything He had to make His bride everything good and glorious.

## 5. It is a sacrificing love

What does this love look like? What is a sermon on love without identifying the truth that *agape* love is sacrificial? Husbands, I know of very few of you who would not willingly stand between your wife and an intruder to offer protection, right? And yet how easily is it for some husbands to be guilty of never considering how to adjust their schedule or career or their own comfort to better benefit their wives. If Jesus followed the attitude of many “Christian” husbands today, He would have never left glory to be our sacrifice for sin. This call to husbands to love their wives not only assumes protection, but also assumes self-sacrifice – the knowing when to give up of your time and energies in order to secure what is best for your wife.

How can any husband strive to be such an example of divine love? Husbands, if you desire to be a truly exemplary husband, then you must become increasingly a man of God in all that you do. Your words and actions in the home must become more and more Christlike and you must strive to being Biblical guidance and direction. Are you tired of hearing this? The only way in which a man might be a godly husband and a godly example of the love of Christ to those around him is be nurturing his own ability to love in His relationship to Jesus. In other words; as a husband becomes more and more like Jesus in conduct and character, the more he will demonstrate the greatness of the love of Christ to her personally and to others practically.

## 6. It is a tender love

In finishing his exhortations for husbands to become like Christ in their relationship to their wives, Paul makes a negative statement, call for them not to **“be embittered against them.”** The word “embittered” speaks of being hard, harsh, and sharp in action and in word. The opposite of such an attitude is that of tenderness. Husbands are to be expressions of tenderness to their wives, not speaking harshly, not being severe with them, but modeling patience and kindness.

What was Paul speaking of when he made this statement? There are two ideas that may be alluded to here, both of which fit. The first is a call to husbands not to take out their frustrations and difficulties in other areas of their lives upon their wives. If the husband has a bad day at work that does not ever give the husband the right to snap and speak harshly or lose his temper at his wife. Husbands, do not let the world, your jobs, your hobbies or any other created thing cause you to be hard, harsh and sharp toward your wife.

The second idea we may glean from this is the truth that we are often more hard on those we are closest to than we are to others. You would never think of yelling at a stranger for say, interrupting your sentence, but you might inappropriately react to such an interruption when it

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comes from your wife. Husbands, you have no right allow your wife’s shortcomings or failures to meet your own expectations in some area as a catalyst for treating her poorly. What I see in our text is that Paul not only calls husbands to have this internal mindset to love their wives, but then say that such a love must be manifest positively. Rather than speaking harshly to your wife, speak tenderly. Instead of reacting rashly to your wife, react patiently. Your love is to be expressed, not in bitterness, but in tenderness.

I read an account of Martin Luther, the great Reformer, who is obviously an example of standing up for Christ, even if it meant standing alone. Listen to this summary concerning Luther and his wife and marriage:

*No one would dispute Luther's ability to take charge of any situation. He was strong-willed, tough-minded, and had the capacity to press important issues to a point of decision. But alongside Luther was his beloved wife, Katie. She was every bit as strong as Luther! She knew when to reel him in, how to enhance his strengths, and what he needed to endure the many battles he faced. But Luther also knew how to affirm his Katie, sending her love notes, opening his heart to her, and engaging her in the warmest of conversations. Her submissiveness was not a timid, mousy, never-get-involved life. She was at the center of his life, a helpmeet of the highest model. And he faithfully exercised his headship in the marriage, demonstrating an unfailing love for Katie above all earthly relationships and finding her counsel to him full of wisdom.*

What a perfect picture of Christ both Martin and Katie exemplified in their marriage. And such a marriage was used to influence so many, including those who sat at Martin’s table and discussed Jesus Christ, the church and theology. Husbands, love your wives. Wives, be subject to your husbands. For in doing so you not only demonstrate your own progress in becoming more and more like Christ in conduct and character, but you will also be used by the Lord to inspire others to take on the Christlike qualities of submission to the Father and of loving the brethren in the Lord.

Never forget that your sanctification affects all of life. Husbands and wives have no justification to exclude their marriage relationship from this process. Such an attitude reveals a gross neglect of what it means to be like Christ. So then, let us all pray for the husbands and wives of this congregation, that God would cause them to become brighter and brighter examples of Christlikeness to the benefit and inspiration of each of to do likewise to the glory of God.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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