

## Living responsibly in our social relationships, part 1: Husbands and wives

Christian Life Disciplines No. 8a, vCCGB

Reading: Colossians 3:17B4:1

### *Introduction*

Good afternoon.

This message continues the series covering basic disciplines for the Christian life. These are not in-depth studies. They are intended to cover basics that every Christian and especially new Christians should know and put into practice. The topics for the messages come from the letters to the churches in the New Testament.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome explaining the gospel. He said that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe (*Romans 1:16*). When we think of our salvation, we often think first of the forgiveness which we have in Christ. God has in Christ forgiven us of our sin.

But our salvation is much more than forgiveness. When a person comes to God through Christ, they become a new creation. We receive a new heart that is receptive to God's Word. We receive new desires that want to obey God. We receive a new ability to do what is right. God then expects us now to pursue His righteousness.

To the Colossians Paul wrote, that just as we received Christ Jesus as Lord, we should continue to live in him (*Colossians 2:6*). We have been buried and raised with Christ (*2:12*). Therefore (*3:1ff*), we are to focus on Christ and on things of His. We are to put to death things of our old sinful nature (*Colossians 3:5*).

Becoming new creations should affect every area of our lives. The area which we will begin to look more closely at this morning is how we are to function in our social relationships.

There were primarily three social relationships which concerned people in NT times. These included the relationship of a husband and wife, the relationship of parents and their children, and the relationship of masters and their slaves. The first two continue today in our culture. The principles for masters and slaves apply today to employers and employees or bosses and their workers.

In both Colossians and Ephesians these three relationships are considered in pairs. I believe that it is important to consider them as pairs. We tend to push off blame and responsibility onto others. The actions of one person does affect other people. The action of a husband, for example, affects the wife and the children. But God does not excuse us from our responsibilities even when the other person fails in theirs. We need to know what God expects from both parties in these social relationships.

It is also important to note that in these functional pairs B husband-wife, parent-child, employer-employee B one or the other may not be a believer. The instructions are to the believer without being conditioned by the spiritual standing of the other person. This is particularly obvious in the master-slave relationship. Paul gave similar instructions to Timothy. He particularly noted how slaves are to act when the masters are believers. It implies that his initial thoughts concerned unbelieving masters. Peter gives instructions to wives with particular reference to husbands who do not believe or obey the word. It should be obvious in our parenting, that the responsibilities do not start only when the children come to faith. Our parenting should have been leading them toward that.

When each part is functioning as it should, things go much better. When both are believers, it is, of course, an advantage. But the believer is not excused from doing what is right, just because the other person is not obeying God.

We will eventually consider each of these three social relationships. This morning we will look at only one. But keep in mind that we are dealing only with basics.

### ***The relationship of husbands and wives***

*Colossians 3:18-19; Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7; cf. Titus 2:4-5*

The first relationship to examine is that of husbands and wives. In all these instructions it is talking about a man=s responsibility to his own wife and a woman=s responsibility to her own husband. It is not men to women in general or women to men in general.

However, these are principles for everyone. We can learn from them how to become a more godly person, whether married or single.

#### **I. *The responsibility of wives to their own husbands***

Paul writes to the Colossians, *Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord.* It is the same instruction which he gives to the Ephesians and the same which Peter gives in his first letter.

To the Ephesians Paul adds the idea of respect, *the wife must respect her husband* (*Ephesians 5:33*). Peter adds the character qualities of purity and a gentle and quiet spirit (*1 Peter 3:4*).

1. The concept of submitting is a recognition of a functional structure. Functionally in a marriage the husband is the head. Final responsibility for decisions rest with him. Seeing that things get done rests with him. Submission is not a statement about superiority or inferiority. Submission is giving the other person the final say.

In Ephesians Paul says that all believers should submit to one another. As believers we defer to one another. We do so, not because one is inferior. We do so, because it is right. Paul applies to wives the general command to submit. Wives particularly need to work at submitting to their own husbands.

2. In Colossians 3:18 Paul says she should submit *as fitting in the Lord*. When a wife submits to her husband, she expresses an understanding and acceptance of God=s plan for order. It is not an admission that the husband always makes better decisions. (That is certainly not true.) It is an acceptance of God=s plan. It is a recognition that it is a good plan.

People sometimes ask if a wife must submit to a command to sin, like lying. This phrase, *as fitting in the Lord*, answers that question. It excludes clear disobedience to God. I do not believe that a wife must submit to her husband if he requires something clearly contrary to Scripture. But be sure that there is clear Scripture which says what is wrong and right. In all cases a wife should have a gentle and quiet spirit. She should demonstrate that she knows that there is a God who judges.

3. *Respect*

Western culture is attacking the idea of respect. It is especially scorns the idea of wives respecting their husbands. Please be aware of this influence and reject it.

Television and movies portray men as stupid and childish or even evil. The wives are presented as smart and mature. According to these films there is no reason for a woman to respect a man. It would be laughable to do so.

A friend and former colleague taught on this at a Bible school in Germany some years ago. Not one girl in the class could give one example how a woman could respect a man. It is no wonder that marriages have problems.

Men consider their work important. Respect that. Do not make little what they do. Men want to provide for their families. Do not make little their efforts to do that. Do not make jokes about your husband. You would not do that to a client which you needed. You would not do that to your boss, if you wanted to keep your job.

Wives, submit and respect your husbands.

If you are not married, you can still work at having the right attitudes. Work at having a gentle and quiet spirit. Learn how to show respect to others.

## II. *The responsibility of husbands to their own wives*

If men were fulfilling their responsibilities to their own wives, then the wives would have it must easier. The responsibility of husbands to their own wives is the other part of the pair.

### 1. The responsibility of the husband to his wife is to love her.

a. Paul takes only a half of a verse to state this to the Colossians. He takes nine verses to do the same in Ephesians. In Ephesians he compares the love of the husband for his wife with the love of Christ for the church. He reminds husbands that husband and wife have become one flesh. Therefore, the husband should care for his wife as he would take care of his own body.

God made the Church to be the Body of Christ. Christ loves the church as His own Body. A husband should love his wife as his own body.

We care for our bodies. We make sure that we are fed. We make sure that we get our tea or coffee in the morning. If we are cold, we put on a coat.

We try not to injure our bodies. We are careful with knives, so as not to cut ourselves. Husbands should treat their wives the same way. They should be careful not to injure them either physically or emotionally. Husbands should assure that their wives have what they need. It is more than food on the table. It includes emotional and spiritual needs.

We husbands should treat our wives as our own bodies.

b. Christ also denied Himself in order to serve the church. He denied Himself even unto death, in order to purchase life for us. He Himself committed no sin. But He bore our sins that we might die to sin and live to righteousness (*1 Peter 2:22-24*). Jesus had all the riches and glory of heaven, but became poor for us. He emptied Himself in order to serve us (*Philippians 2:7*).

Husbands, if we have not denied ourselves for the sake of our wives, then we have not loved them as we should. We are to love our wives as Christ loved the church.

We come home from work, and we are tired. Perhaps you have been dealing with people all day. You may have been doing things that others have wanted from you. We get home and we want our rest. We want to do something for ourselves. But your wife has needs. She wants your attention. She wants your help. She wants some solutions for problems with the kids. Do you go off and read the paper? Do you turn on the TV? Do you play a computer game? Or do you deny yourself what you want? Do you deny yourself what you may think you even need for the sake of your wife?

Work is important to men. I believe that God created us to work. But men turn this into something wrong. They define their success in life by their careers. They choose to serve their careers rather than obey God. If we choose success in our career over loving our wives, we have disobeyed God. We might have success now, but we will be ashamed when we stand before God.

This is the love to which God has called husbands to have toward their wives. We are to love them as our own bodies. We are to deny ourselves for their sake.

If you are not married, you are not excused from serving. Every believer is to think more highly of others than himself or herself. The example of Jesus is for all of us. The challenge for the married is special. The responsibility to serve (or submit) continues when one comes home. It may even intensify. If you are not married, practice now serving. Learn what it means to deny yourself for others.

2. Paul adds in the last half of Colossians 3:19 that husbands should not become embittered. *[English translations vary here, some have *do not be harsh*, but I believe that the better translation is *do not become embittered*. It includes the idea of harsh, but is more as explained below. I do not know how Chinese versions have this verse, but it would be best if the sense of *do not become embittered* rather than *do not be harsh* was used.]*
  - a. Bitterness can reveal itself in our tone of voice. It produces a harshness in what we say and do. But to be embittered is worse than even a harsh word. In Hebrews 12:15 it refers to bitterness as root which sprouts trouble. To become embittered then produces harshness again and again.
  - b. Bitterness occurs when we haven't forgiven a wrong. We think things are fine until our wife repeats that wrong. She does or says the same stupid thing that we have complained about so often. Of course we remember those times. We lose our patience. We say some unkind word or express it in an unkind manner. But love is kind. Love is patient. Love does not keep track of wrongs. (*1 Corinthians 13:4-5*) When that unkind, impatient response comes out of our mouths, we have the ugly proof that we are not loving. And God has commanded us to love our wives. We are to love as Christ loved the church. He loved us while we were yet sinners. He loved us and forgave us by dying for us. To love our wives is to accept and assume in ourselves the consequences of our wives' failure to be perfect. I will choose to be patient when she asks me the same question for the third time. I will choose to be kind, when she interrupts. I will not keep record of wrongs. I will forgive. I will not let bitterness grow in my heart. I will love.
3. Peter does not use the word *love* in his commands to husbands. He calls upon husbands to live with their wives according to knowledge. He commands husbands to treat their wives with respect as the weaker vessel and fellow heir of the gracious gift of life (*1 Peter 3:7*). I believe that living according to knowledge is necessary to love your wife. Treating her with respect is an expression of loving your wife. To be a good follower of Jesus, I need to get to know my wife well. Then I can minister to her effectively. In love I will take into consideration her physical weaknesses. I will recognize at the same time that she is no less a child of God than I am.

### **Conclusion**

The state of affairs among marriages is horrible. Even among believers it is often not good. For the most part it stems from a failure to obey Scripture. God created marriage. His instructions for marriage are good. Our marriages should be pictures of the relation between Jesus and the church. When our marriages are less than what they should be, we distort a God-created picture of His saving work. We will also suffer personally.

But the way out of the mess is simple. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church. Wives, submit to and respect your husbands.

Christ died in our place so that we might die to sin and to live for righteousness. This applies to our marriage as well as any other area of life.

It hurts when our marriages are not right. But the problem is not with marriage. God created marriage as something very good. The problem is sin. We rebel against God's instructions for marriage. We reap the result.

We can change that by confessing sin. We can trust God and obey Him. Trust Him and He will give us His peace.