

**Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (20):
"Be subject..."**

Today we will begin to consider a new section of this epistle of Paul to the Colossians. The subject of the Christian life has been the main emphasis of this portion of Paul's epistle that we have been studying. Paul set forth his teaching on the Christian life beginning with 3:5 which continues through 4:6. Within these verses the apostle first set forth what Christians were to "put off" (3:5-11), in which he identified behaviour and attitudes that *should not* characterize Christians. He then set forth in 3:12-17 (the passage we have considered in the last few weeks) behaviour and attitudes that *should* characterize Christians, things that we should "put on." But beginning with Colossians 3:18, the apostle began to give instruction regarding the relationships of Christians with others, particularly how Christians are to behave toward those in authority over them. And so, Paul addressed here the important principle of "submission" to human authority on the part of God's people. Of course Paul's instruction was directly applicable to the large households that existed in the first century Roman Empire and which much have existed in the church at Colossae. But the apostle, inspired by the Holy Spirit, showed forth the abiding authority for Christians that those under human authority have responsibility to labor with diligence and obedience to the directives given them by those over them. Paul also gave a word directed to "masters", those in authority within the household and workplace, that they treat those under their authority with decency, respect, and consideration.

Let us read Colossians 3:18 through 4:1.

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. ²⁰Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. ²²Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. ^{4:1}Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Now Christians have before them in the whole of Holy Scriptures the setting forth of the will of God in all matters of their faith and practice. The Bible is the Word of God. It is our instruction book on how to live before God in His world. We accept this book as authoritative instruction from God to us. We seek to understand His Word and apply it in every aspect of our belief and practice. And here in the passage before us, God instructs us in the kind of desires and attitudes that we should possess and exhibit in our family relations, as well as our work relations.

Now, the instruction that our Lord sets before us in this passage presumes the worldview that is reflected in all of God's Word. We understand our world and our relationships with people in this world as our Creator has set forth for us in this most Holy Word, our Bible. This Christian worldview has predominated in history, at least in our Western hemisphere, since the days of Rome's fading glory. But those days seem now to be past for us. In this generation in which we live our society has jettisoned old standards and values. A new worldview has become predominant, one created and promoted by those with a non-Christian, even antichristian worldview. The new world view has been formed and shaped largely by the entertainment industry, both in cinema and music, but also promoted by the school system, in both its elementary and higher institutions. And one of the major victims of this new worldview is the dissolution of marriage and the family that God has prescribed in His Word. Many, even in churches, no

longer have a clear and precise understanding what the Word of God prescribes regarding the family, with its foundational institution of marriage. I thought that it would be beneficial, therefore, to rehearse before us the major teachings of God's Word regarding these matters. Then we may better understand and apply the principles of relationship within the family institution that are set before us here in Colossians 3 and elsewhere. For the instruction of this passage presumes a world view that many no longer understand or embrace.

I thought that this would be a good thing that we do especially upon some news that came out just in the last several days. One of the institutions that has promoted a traditional understanding of marriage has been the Roman Catholic Church. And although we would differ from some of what Rome has taught regarding the institution of family and marriage, Roman Catholicism has maintained and promoted for centuries a Christian understanding of marriage and the family. But that seems to be changing. Here is the news item released two days ago.

Pope Francis insisted that individual conscience be the guiding principle for Catholics negotiating the complexities of sex, marriage and family life in a major document released Friday that rejects the emphasis on black and white rules for the faithful.

In the 256-page document "The Joy of Love," Francis makes no change in church doctrine.

But in selectively citing his predecessors and emphasizing his own teachings, Francis makes clear that he wants nothing short of a revolution in the way priests accompany Catholics, saying the church must no longer sit in judgment and "throw stones" against those who fail to live up to the Gospel's ideals of marriage and family life.¹

This is quite a major and amazing shift in the teaching and practice of Roman Catholicism. Pope Francis declared that dogma will no longer be the standard by which faith and practice are assessed, but in its place the "individual conscience" will become the standard. I would think that traditional Catholic priests and practicing Catholics everywhere must be stunned by this announcement. The Church will no longer sit in judgment against those who fail to live up to "the Gospel's ideals of marriage and family life." Historically Rome has declared and assumed that both the Holy Scriptures and Tradition are co-equal authorities over all faith and practice. (Protestants have historically held to the Scriptures alone as our authority.) But this declaration of the pope conflicts with this long-held tenant of Rome. Now one's own conscience will be "the guiding principle for Catholics" with respect to "the complexities of sex, marriage and family life." Of course the major problem with this new stance is that the conscience is no reliable objective standard for Christian behaviour. It is a subjective standard of measurement, therefore it is really no true standard by which behavior may be assessed or evaluated.

Let us take a few minutes to consider what the conscience is.

What is the conscience? The conscience is that faculty that every human being possesses that discerns between right and wrong. The human conscience identifies what is right and what is wrong, and as a result moves an individual either to feel guilty or not guilty about himself. God placed in us our conscience. When we feel guilty, it is not simply because we have violated a human standard of our own, but we violate God's laws that were written on our hearts from creation (cf. Rom. 2:14, 15). But the conscience is not reliable and unchangeable, and therefore it is no reliable standard of morality. The standards of conscience will vary from person to person. The reason for this is that a person's sin will affect his conscience.

How does sin affect the conscience? The conscience cannot be destroyed, for it is an aspect of human nature. But the conscience can be defaced or twisted. Through the influence of one's involvement and exposure to sin, a person may sear his conscience to such a degree that his sensitivity to sin is not what it once was. What he once condemned in himself, he now excuses. Some may so deaden

¹ "Pope Francis says conscience, not dogma, must guide Catholics in family life." Associated Press, April 08, 2016.

their sensitivity to sin that they come to view evil as good, and evil is seen as good. There are things they think and do today which they themselves would have condemned not that long ago. But the capability to distinguish between these two principles, good and evil, is always present. But what defines good and evil have changed. The conscience is not, therefore, an infallible guide. Scripture must inform and shape the conscience. Scripture must reinforce the values that are programmed in our conscience.

What are the effects of a guilty conscience in a person? *First, a guilty conscience will result in damaging one's own conception of himself and how he views the world about him.* He may withdraw into himself. His ability to think and focus his mind may be greatly diminished. He may lose touch with reality. He comes to the point he is not able to function on a day to day basis. Many mentally disturbed people are so because they are consumed with feelings of guilt within their conscience. *Second, a guilty conscience will result in damage to human relationships.* Feelings of guilt separate people from one another. Guilty people will feel alone, and may prefer to be alone. They are ashamed when those who know their sin see them. They may be suspicious, and even very critical of others, in order to justify themselves. Or, they may be very permissive and non-condemning of others, for to condemn them would only reaffirm their own guilt, for they do the same things. *Third, a guilty conscience will result in damage to one's relationship with God.* Here, too, sin separates us from God. God bars us from coming into His presence because of our sin. "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:2). But sin also bars us from wanting to approach Him. Our guilty conscience prohibits us from feeling we can come into His presence, for to do so, we would see ourselves as justly condemned by Him.

We only need to consider the result of the sin of our first parents in the Garden of Eden. When God came to them, they fled from Him. They knew they were "naked." That is they knew they were sinners. They were ashamed; they could not face holiness. They would sooner flee from God rather than to come into His presence.

How do people deal with their guilty conscience? *First, they justify their sin by blaming others.* This has been the way that worldly psychology has historically dealt with guilty feelings. "It's really not your fault; it was your mother's." Actually, anything that you can convince a guilty person to transfer his blame will do, whether it be society's fault, your genes... *Second, they try to mollify their conscience by redirecting their lives on other matters.* They give themselves over in an obsessive way to their work, their hobby, a sport, some activity to take their mind off that which so troubles them. *Third, they seek to soothe their conscience through drugs or alcohol.* *Fourth, they seek to ease their guilty conscience by redefining their own and society's standards of morality.* They say something like this: "The reason we feel so bad about ourselves because of this lifestyle or behaviour, is because society has imposed its standards on the collective conscience of our culture. We must, therefore, educate people to be tolerant, accepting, even affirming." And so what was once seen to be wrong must come to be seen as not wrong, even right. But the law that God has written on the heart will still be there. Yes, maybe the conscience has been seared to a degree, but the slightest reminder of the law of God brings it back with great force bearing down on a person's soul; he condemns himself. A *fifth* way they deal with a guilty conscience is *to gather with others who have experienced similar* things that they have experienced and now practice. There is a soothing of conscience when there are many that do the same things. A *sixth* way people deal with a guilty conscience is that *they may seek to soothe their conscience by doing good deeds.* They believe that their works of righteousness will offset their acts of sin. They feel better about themselves because they do works of kindness toward others. And a *seventh* way that people will deal with a guilty conscience is that *they will use religion.* They go to church not because they love God but because they feel guilty and church going and church involvement give them a temporary reprieve from their misery. Liturgy is particularly appealing to folks with guilty consciences. They burn candles and incense, chant and recite formulas. They bathe in rivers, offer sacrifices, cut themselves, and punish themselves. These kinds of things help people who feel guilty feel better about themselves, that is, for a while, but it does not last.

We read of the conditions in the days of ancient Israel during the period of the Judges. "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

That is what the world is like when the individual conscience is the guiding principle. The only unchangeable standard that God has made available to you and me is that of the Holy Scriptures. In this Word God, Who cannot lie, God, Who cannot change, has revealed His will regarding how He would have us live in His world. He has established the institution of marriage and the principles by which that institution are to be governed. And so, *what does the Word of God say about marriage?*

1. Marriage is a creation ordinance, or institution, in which God joins one man and one woman together in a holy relationship, which God blesses for their mutual pleasure and well-being, and for the propagation of their children.

The Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England has a very good, and perhaps familiar opening statement that is read by the one who performs the marriage ceremony:

Dearly beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony. God established the bond and covenant of marriage in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people.

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which God instituted it.

We may make several authoritative and truth statements about the nature of marriage as an institution of God. **First, marriage is a creation ordinance.** It is not a church sacrament as taught by Roman Catholicism. God gave marriage to all people, having joined Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the progenitors of the whole human race. The formal institution of marriage should be recognized among all people, whether they are Christian or not.

Second, God has declared in His Word that sexual relations between a husband and wife are a blessing from Him. Hebrews 13:4a reads, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled..." God has created and sanctioned the normal relations between husband and wife. Their physical relations with one another are normal, healthy, and righteous before God.

Third, God has declared that He will judge all those who commit sexual relations outside of marriage that He has sanctioned. God only sanctions relations within the marriage relationship in which He has bound husband and wife together. Hebrews 13:4 reads in its entirety, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; **but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.**" Fornication is a broad term, referring to any and all sexual sin. Fornication includes all sexual relations outside of a legitimate marriage relationship. Adultery is the violation of marital fidelity with someone other than his/her spouse. God has declared that all sexual relations outside of marriage will bring His condemnation in this life and on the final Day of Judgment.

⁹Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

2. God has established permanence of the one man and one woman in holy matrimony.

The Lord Jesus was challenged one day about the matter of divorce. In His answer to them He called upon the original state of Adam and Eve as the paradigm for God's will respecting marriage. We read in Matthew 19:3ff this account:

³The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"

⁴And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female", ⁵and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? ⁶So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matt. 19:3-6)

God has decreed a moral law that marriage is the joining of one man and one woman in the marriage relationship. God has determined that marriage will last until death brings dissolution of that relationship. Divorce happens, but God hates divorce (Cf Mal. 2:16).

3. God has permitted divorce when one spouse has been unfaithful to his/her marriage partner.

Down through biblical history there have been different grounds for divorce. Under the Old Testament economy, God permitted divorce if a man would give his wife a formal writing declaring that he was divorcing her. We read our Lord speaking of this in Matthew 19.

⁷They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?"

⁸He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so." (Matt. 19:7, 8)

Actually, the Law of Moses that required a writing of divorcement to be drafted and formalized was an act of mercy on the vulnerable wife. Before this law, divorce was regarded as easily obtained by the husband simply stating verbally of his desire no longer to be married to his wife. The Law of Moses brought some measure of protection for the helpless wife. Regarding the instruction in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which addresses the matter of divorce, it has been said, "The restriction on remarriage of a divorced couple after intervening marriage discourages casual divorces."²

4. God has not permitted remarriage after a prior divorce, but with one exception.

The Lord Jesus declared that if one marries a divorced person, he commits adultery in doing so. Mark 10:11 and 12 read,

"So He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. ¹²And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'"

But in Matthew 19 our Lord Jesus gave the one exception clause. We read our Lord's words in Matthew 19:7ff after He had declared, "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

⁷They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" ⁸He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. ⁹And I say to you, whoever divorces his

² R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., *The Reformation Study Bible* (Reformation Trust, 2015), p. 286.

wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.” (Matt. 19:7-9)

God views a remarriage as legitimate when it follows a divorce that had resulted from the unfaithfulness of the spouse in the first marriage.

Now many teach that there is a second cause of divorce in which God allows for remarriage. This is in the case of *abandonment*, when one spouse breaks and leaves the marriage covenant. They base this position on 1 Corinthians 7:15, which reads, “*If the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases.* But God has called us to peace.” It is said that the spouse who had been abandoned is not “under bondage”, which means, they say, that he/she is free to remarry with God’s blessing. But I would take issue with this interpretation for two reasons. First, Paul was not instructing the abandoned spouse about the matter of remarriage; rather, he was telling that abandoned one that he/she need not be distressed about maintaining or restoring the relationship--“a brother or sister is not under bondage” to cling to that former spouse. If he departs, let him depart. A second reason that this passage does not legitimize remarriage in the case of abandonment is that it would provide an additional exception for remarriage when our Lord clearly declared that *there was only one exception*, and that was marital infidelity.

Here is a good summary of the biblical teaching on *Marriage and Divorce*. This is a theological note in *The New Reformation Study Bible*, page 1491.

Marriage is an exclusive relationship in which a man and a woman commit themselves to each other in covenant for life, on the basis of this solemn vow to become “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24; Mal. 2:14; Matt. 19:4-6).

The *Westminster Confession* (XXIV.2) states: “Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the church with an holy seed; and for preventing uncleanness” (sexual license and immorality; Gen. 1:28; 2:18; 1 Cor. 7:2-9). God’s ideal for marriage is that the man and woman should complete each other (Gen. 2:23) and share in the creative work of making new people. Marriage is for Christians and non-Christians, but it is God’s will that His people should marry only fellow believers (1 Cor. 7:39; cf. 2 Cor. 6:14; Ezra 9; 10; Neh. 13:23-27). Intimacy in its deepest dimension is impossible when partners are not united in faith.

Paul uses Christ’s relationship to His church to explain what Christian marriage is, so as to highlight the husband’s special responsibility as the wife’s leader and protector, and the wife’s calling to accept her husband in that role (Eph. 5:21-33). The distinction of roles does not imply that the wife is an inferior person. As God’s image-bearers, both man and wife have equal dignity and value, and they must fulfil their roles with a mutual respect grounded in the recognition of this fact.

God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), yet He provided a procedure for it that would protect the divorced wife (Deut. 24:1-4). This provision was made “because of the hardness of your hearts” (Matt. 19:8). The most natural understanding of Jesus’ teaching (Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:8, 9) is that adultery, the sin of marital unfaithfulness, destroys the marriage covenant and warrants divorce (though reconciliation would be preferable), and that he who divorces his wife for any lesser reason becomes guilty of adultery when he remarries, and drives the woman into adultery if she remarries. The principle is that all cases of divorce and remarriage involve a disruption of God’s ideal for the sexual relationship. When asked when divorce is lawful, Jesus replied that divorce is always deplorable (Matt. 19:3-6), but He did not deny that hearts continue to be hard, and that divorce, though an evil, may sometimes be permitted.

Paul says that a Christian who is deserted by an unbelieving partner is not “under bondage” (1 Cor. 7:15). This evidently means that the Christian may regard the relationship as finished. Whether this confers the right of remarriage has been disputed, and Reformed opinion has long been divided

on the matter.

The *Westminster Confession* (XXIV. 5, 6) states with cautious wisdom what Reformed Christians, reflecting on the Scriptures noted above, have down through the centuries found themselves agreed on regarding divorce:

In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce: and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.

Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage; yet, nothing but adultery, or such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: wherein, a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case.

Let us now return to our text in Colossians 3:18ff.

1. Instruction to wives. We read in verse 18, “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”

God has not only established the institution of marriage and the family, but He has revealed how He would have the relationships within that institution regulated. Paul wrote, “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.” Paul’s instruction in Ephesians is even more explicit:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. (Eph. 5:22-24)

Because of sin, the wife does not do this normally and naturally. If the truth be known, in the vast number of instances, the wife desires to be led by her husband, but she wants to be led in the way she wants to go. In other words, because of sin, wives will tend to be controlling rather than submissive. It takes God’s grace for a godly wife to live in the manner that the Lord has commanded for her in this verse. Because of sin, submission does not come naturally.

We could look down through biblical history and see how wives have troubled their own households by taking matters into their own hands, as they resisted or rebelled against their husbands rather than submitting to them. Proverbs 19:13 reads, “the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping.” Proverbs 27:15 reads, “A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.” And Proverbs 14:1 describes what happens when a wife takes matters into her own hands: “Every wise woman builds her house: but the foolish plucks it down with her hands.”

What Scriptural principles should a wife know and follow to help her obey the Lord in this matter? ***First, wives are to humble themselves before the Lord and purpose by God’s grace to do the will of God in submitting to her husband’s leadership.*** She is to obey him, seeking to do his will. Paul wrote, “As the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing” (Eph. 5:24). Take note, the Scriptures say ‘in every thing.’ Of course this does not mean that she is to sin if her husband would have her do so. Again, Colossians 3:18 reads, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.” But aside from what is sinful, she is to obey her husband in all areas. To fail in this is to rebel against God and may even result in the word of God being blasphemed. We read in Titus 2:5 that a wife is to be “discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”

Secondly, a wife is to recognize and respect her husband’s position as the head of the marriage and family. Ephesians 5:23 records, “or the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the Saviour of the body.” It is important that a wife distinguish between the position of her husband and the person of her husband. She is to obey her husband because of the position and

responsibility that God has given him, irrespective of whether he rises to a level of competence in that position. He has that position irrespective of whether he is a Christian or not. Husbands are the heads of their wives.

Thirdly, a wife must believe that God is sovereign and that He controls the decisions and directs the steps of her husband. The wife must believe that God will overrule even the poor decisions of her husband and thereby He will lead her by means of directing her husband. She must have confidence in God Who is guiding her in His providence. If she in faith believes this biblical truth, then she can be content in the Lord regardless of what her husband does. She knows that even on those occasions when her husband makes foolish and selfish decisions that will adversely affect their lives, she is assured that through it all God will accomplish His purposes for His glory and her ultimate good.

Fourthly, a wife must learn to appeal to her husband when she disagrees with his decision. When we speak of a wife submitting to her husband we are not suggesting silence on her part when she perceives things are not going as she thinks they should. No, she has a responsibility to make known her opinion, but to do so in a godly, humble, and biblical manner. What then is it for a wife to appeal to her husband? It occurs when the wife politely and in a spirit of meekness attempts to lay out her case to her husband as to what she perceives to be the will of God. She expresses to him in meekness and with respect toward him her assessment and her advice. But, and this is important, she conveys to her husband that she will abide by his decision. Ultimately, right or wrong, it is his judgment call. God has made him responsible for his wife and his children.

2. Instruction to husbands. We read in Colossians 3:19, “Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.”

Husbands are to humble themselves and purpose by God’s grace to do the will of God. This involves first, that a husband denies himself of his own pleasures and assumes his responsibility to lovingly lead his wife. We read the command in Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives.” Second, a husband is to be patient with his wife to the point of patiently enduring her insensitivity or resistance to him. The Lord Jesus Himself provides an example. Husbands are to love their wives “even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” He must not use coercion or force to impose his will. He is to lead her, not drive her. He is to be loving and patient toward his wife even when she resists or refuses to yield to him. Again, Colossians 3:19, “love your wives, and be not bitter against them.” Third, a husband is to seek to lead his wife to become holy and pure. As Christ with His church, the husband should seek to “sanctify and cleanse” his wife “with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church (bride), not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Fourth, a husband is to listen to his wife’s counsel, for she is designed by God to be his helpmate. But ultimately the responsibility rests upon him. God has ordained that the husband determines the direction for his family.

One can look down through biblical history and see that husbands have failed their wives. Husbands tend to act out of selfishness even at the expense of their wives. You remember Abraham. Although he was a godly man, he accepted out of selfish concern placing his wife Sarah in a very difficult situation. Genesis 20:2 reads, “And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, she is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah.” Nevertheless, God preserved Sarah. We read in verse 3 that God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, “Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man’s wife.”

Abraham’s son, Isaac, followed his father’s example and acted the same way toward his wife, Rebecca. Rather than preserve the moral purity and safety of his wife, Isaac placed Rebecca in a very vulnerable situation. After they went to dwell in Gerar, “the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, ‘She is my wife; lest,’ said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebecca; because she was fair to look upon” (Gen. 26:7). God spared Rebecca through her difficult experience just as He had spared Sarah before her.

2. Instruction to children. Colossians 3:20f, “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.”

Children are to be obedient to their parents. This is the will of God. God has appointed parents as the protectors and instructors of their children. It is the parents’ responsibility to be faithful to their children in instruction, chastening, and training. It is the responsibility of children to obey their parents. Of course this is what is sated in the 5th commandment. “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you” (Exo 20:12). A child honors his parent by obeying his parent. A child who disobeys his parent, dishonors not only his parent, but also God, for God has appointed that parent in that important position of responsibility.

In conclusion let us affirm that the will of God in marital relations is clearly written in His Word. If one affirms that Scriptures are the authoritative Word of God, then they are to be our rule for life, regardless of whether its prescriptions are in accord with present day thought or our personal preferences born out of fallen hearts. May our Lord help us to order our lives according to His will. May He enable us by His grace to enjoy His full blessing within our families.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 15:13)