

**The Little Church, Part 2**  
**Colossians 3:19**  
Sunday, July 9th, 2023

It was 5 weeks before my 21st year on planet earth that Jan and I were married. Needless to say, I was not yet ready to be a husband. Or at least I made some pretty bad decisions due to my immaturity and lack of experience. I'll share one of those with you today.

I was in my 4th year on active duty with the US Air Force and had been stationed at Frances E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming for about a year. That was plenty of time to grow close with the other guys on my missile security flight. We guarded intercontinental ballistic missiles together in the panhandle of Nebraska, we recreated together, we lived in the same dormitory, we broke bread together. Needless to say, we were pretty tight.

One day shortly after Jan and I were married, one of the guys organized a guys' night out for the next evening. Naturally, I was looking forward to being with the guys...until I told Jan about it. She was none too pleased. Even so, I chose to hang out with the guys, and I just couldn't understand why Jan was upset. It was harvest time, so I took home a pumpkin for her as some kind of peace offering.. Again, it was not a good thing.

*What was the problem?* We could discuss several factors that play into such an interchange, but what it came down to is, I wasn't loving Jan as my wife when I chose to be with the guys instead. Just a couple of weeks removed from our wedding!

Unfortunately, that is not the only time I failed at being a husband (it probably wasn't the only time that week!) It is a series of miracles that Jan and I are still together after 41 years of marriage. I still choose Daren over Jan way more than I should.

Tragically, there are many Christian husbands who don't know how to love their wives. *Perhaps like, me, they didn't have a good, Christian role model in their fathers?* Other husbands have incredible challenges - they may not be married to a Christian wife. Some are married to wives who are living only or primarily for themselves. Still other husbands have wives that have beaten them down for years, trying to make their husbands into someone they can rule...or kick to the curb.

Last Sunday, I shared a quote of Jonathan Edwards' concerning the Christian family. He once wrote - "Every Christian family ought to be a little Church." I've connected that quote to four verses in **Colossians Chapter 3 (verses 18-21)**. Last Sunday, we looked - albeit far too briefly - at verse 18 and the biblical command for Christian wives to submit to their husbands. (You should be able to find that sermon on the Trinity Church Facebook page).

Today, we move to the other half of biblical marriage, and we'll see what God's Word commands of Christian husbands. If the word which characterizes the wife's duty in marriage is "submit", then the word characterizing the husband's duty in marriage is "love."

**Colossians 3:19:**

“Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.”

A good first question for Christian husbands to ask of this text is this - *What does God have in mind here when He commands husbands to love their wives? What does He mean by this choice of words?*

It's helpful for us to remember the spiritual reality God illustrates with marriage - in Christian marriage, the husband is the head, and the wife is the body. We find such teaching, for example, in **Ephesians Chapter 5, verses 21-33**. There we see that the husband's role in the marital relationship is to reflect the position of Christ Jesus as the Head of the Church - His body, which is what the wife's role in the marital relationship is. That implies that the husband is in submission to Jesus Christ as Lord and Master.

No Christian woman would object for a single moment to be in submission to her husband, if her husband was Jesus Christ. But, God's Word commands her to submit to her husband who is *not* Jesus Christ. The Christian wife's believing husband is to mirror the love, grace, and mercy of Jesus Christ in their daily relationship. As the husband submits to Jesus Christ in every way, the wife, in turn, is to willingly and fully submit to her husband in all things. This is true love being worked out in a marriage!

The Apostle John expands upon this when he writes in **1 John 4: 17-19**:

“**17** Love has been perfected among us in this:  
that we may have boldness in the day of judgment;  
because as He is, so are we in this world.  
**18** There is no fear in love;  
but perfect love casts out fear,  
because fear involves torment.  
But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.  
**19** We love Him because He first loved us.”

John teaches here that there is “no fear in love.” Fear is the opposite of love; it is the antithesis of biblical love. Think about it - when we fear something or someone - we steer clear of it or him/her. We do nothing for the object we fear. Fear causes inaction. Biblical love, on the other hand, **is other-centered action**. It is behavior borne out of a desire to serve others; to meet them at their point of need. It is passion in action.

The other thing this passage in 1 John 4 teaches us is that love cannot be given unless a person has already been loved by God. We are able to love God only because He first loved us. And, if we love God, we will love everything about Him - His nature, His characteristics, His Word, His purposes, and His people.

But, there is more. Not only does love not contain fear and it must be first be exercised toward us by God, **Ephesians 5:29** answers the question posed at the beginning of this exposition: *What does God have in mind here when He commands husbands to love their wives?* This is **Ephesians 5:29** - “For no one ever hated his own

flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church.” A Christian husband’s love for His believing wife consists of nourishing and cherishing.

“Nourishing” speaks to the husband caring, feeding, and looking after his wife. In the context this refers primarily to the spiritual nourishment provided by the Word of God. This means the Christian husband must grasp the leadership role in the Christian family. My observation, though, is there are way too many husbands who are ignorant of what God’s Word teaches. One cannot teach what he doesn’t know!

“Cherishing” is not a word we hear much these days. However, traditional wedding vows typically include the word “cherish.” To the groom, Christian husbands take a vow such as this - **“Will you have this woman to be your wedded wife, to live with her after God’s commandments in the holy estate of marriage? And will you love her, honor and cherish her, so long as you both shall live?”**

The word “Cherish” is also used in Paul’s first letter to the **Thessalonian Church in 2:7**, “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” To cherish our wives, Christian husbands, we must exercise gentleness and kindness to them.

**Application:** The church stands poised to help you with your marriage, my brothers. Simply reach out for such help. Don’t wait for someone to come to you. Your buy in is assured if you put forth the effort to build, protect, and save your family.

You must put yourself in places where you will learn God’s Word:

- Regularly attend worship, and when your family is absent from worship, seek to attend worship when you may be away from here.
- Regularly attend a Sunday School class or Bible study outside of Sunday worship.
- Listen to good podcasts, recordings or radio programs that feature help for Christian husbands.

Brother, your wife is looking to you to provide spiritual leadership for your family. Start today - and wives, if I may ask you to support your husband when he is striving to lead well or taking steps to assume leadership of your family.

So that covers the first half of verse 19 - **“Husbands, love your wives.”** The second half is **“and do not be bitter toward them.”** Christian husbands, we have the sacred duty to love our wives, but God also commands us to not be bitter toward them. Perhaps your Bible here reads, “don’t be harsh” instead of “don’t be bitter.”

“We live in a culture of violence, which has for too long silently tolerated abuses against women in the home, in the workplace, through pornography, and sadly, even the Church. We must not allow this text to be misused to apply pressure on wives to put up with husbands who abuse them emotionally, sexually, or physically, or who abuse their children in any way. Wives are not called to accept mistreatment without complaint. They should be allowed to express anger and grief and may need to take tough stands

to confront their husbands with the consequences of their abusive behavior. Abusers need treatment, wives and children need protection. Such action may be the greatest sign of love.’ (Garland)

MacArthur notes, “Some have suggested that this word “bitter” should be translated “cross.” “Don’t be cross toward them.” Well, either word emphasizes a harshness of temper. It emphasizes that attitude of resentment that leads to misery, and often leads to divorce. The Greek word could be translated here as “exasperate” or “irritate.” “Don’t irritate your wife. Don’t exasperate your wife. Don’t be cross against your wife.”

Christian men - especially - must recognize that female oppression has for too long been among us. Women have not always been treated like the divine image-bearers they are. Napoleon Bonaparte’s comment that “women are nothing but machines for producing children” reflects past sentiments of many Westerners, including, sadly, many in the church.

Still, female oppression and the misuse of Scripture to justify it does not mean Paul’s rules were temporary. Similarities exist between **Colossians 3:18–21** and first-century cultural norms, but the apostle’s guide for families has Christian ideas (love, pleasing the Lord, not discouraging children) woven throughout.

I’ve shared this with you before, but it is so good, so beautiful, and so compelling.

*The last letter from Major Sullivan Ballou, written to his wife leading up to the Civil War battle at First Bull Run (Manassas Creek).*

Headquarters, Camp Clark  
Washington, D.C., July 14, 1861

My Very Dear Wife:

Indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days, perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write you again, I feel impelled to write a few lines, that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more.

Our movement may be one of a few days duration and full of pleasure and it may be one of severe conflict and death to me. Not my will, but thine, O God be done. If it is necessary that I should fall on the battlefield for any country, I am ready. I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in, the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution, and I am perfectly willing to lay down all my joys in this life to pay that debt.

But, my dear wife, when I know, that with my own joys, I lay down nearly all of yours, and replace them in this life with care and sorrows, when, after having eaten for long years the bitter fruit of orphanage myself, I must offer it, as their only sustenance, to my dear little children.

I cannot describe to you my feelings on this calm summer night, when 2,000 men are sleeping around me, many of them enjoying the last, perhaps, before that of death, and I, suspicious that Death is creeping behind me with his fatal dart, am communing with God, my country and thee.

Sarah, my love for you is deathless. It seems to bind me with mighty cables, that nothing but Omnipotence can break; and yet, my love of country comes over me like a strong wind, and bears me irresistibly on with all those chains, to the battlefield. The memories of all the blissful moments I have spent with you come crowding over me, and I feel most deeply grateful to God and you, that I have enjoyed them so long. And how hard it is for me to give them up, and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and seen our boys grow up to honorable manhood around us.

I know I have but few claims upon Divine Providence, but something whispers to me that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, nor that, when my last breath escapes me on the battlefield, it will whisper your name.

Forgive my many faults, and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless, how foolish I have oftentimes been! How gladly would I wash out with my tears, every little spot upon your happiness, and struggle with all the misfortune of this world, to shield you and my children from harm.

O Sarah, if the dead can come back to this earth, and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you in the bright day, and the darkest night amidst your happiest scenes and gloomiest hours always, always, and, if the soft breeze fans your cheek, it shall be my breath. Sarah, do not mourn me dear; think I am gone, and wait for me, for we shall meet again.

As for my little boys, they will grow as I have done, and never know a father's love and care. Little Willie is too young to remember me long, and my blue-eyed Edgar will keep my frolics with him among the dimmest memories of his childhood. Sarah, I have unlimited confidence in your maternal care, and your development of their characters. Tell my two mothers, I call God's blessing upon them. O Sarah, I wait for you there!

- Sullivan. Sullivan Ballou was killed a week later at the First Battle of Bull Run, July 21, 1861. That is a husband who loved his wife!

This past Tuesday (Independence Day), Jan, Georgia, and I enjoyed the Aledo Community Band concert in Central Park. One of the songs the band played was Hymn #660 in the *Trinity Hymnal*, "Our God Beyond all Praising." Turn there now if you would.

This hymn was written specifically for the melody THAXTED in 1982, a composition by the early 20th-century British composer Gustav Holst. Michael Perry, then one of England's most promising composers, wrote the text, "in response to a call for alternative words that would be more appropriate for Christian worship."

The melody THAXTED, named for a small town in the Uttlesford district of Essex, comes from the middle section of the "Jupiter" movement in Holst's orchestral suite, *The Planets*.

Let's stand and sing this great hymn in response to God's Word preached.