

# When Christ Rules A Marriage

## A 5-Day Devotional from Colossians 3:18–19

### Day 1 — Christ Is Lord of Your Home

#### The Lordship That Reaches Every Room

**Scripture to Read:** Colossians 3:15–19, Colossians 1:15–18, Romans 12:1–2

#### Devotional

Most of us have a tendency to divide life into categories. There's the spiritual stuff — church, prayer, Bible reading — and then there's everything else. Work. Finances. Relationships. Marriage. We keep them in separate lanes and manage them accordingly. It feels tidy. Organized. Reasonable.

But Paul won't let us live that way.

Before he gives a single instruction about marriage, he lays down a foundation in Colossians 3:17 that makes compartmentalization impossible: "*Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.*" Everything. Not most things. Not the religious things. Everything — including what happens inside your home, behind closed doors, in the ordinary moments nobody else sees.

This is actually good news, even when it doesn't feel like it. Because it means Christ isn't interested in the polished version of your marriage you present to the world. He's interested in the real one. The one that exists on a Wednesday evening when you're both tired and the conversation goes sideways. The one that shows up in how you speak to each other when no one is watching.

The lordship of Christ isn't a Sunday category. It's a claim on everything — and that claim reaches all the way into your marriage. Not to condemn what He finds there, but to redeem it. Not to beat you up, but to expose what isn't working and replace it with something better.

The commands Paul gives in verses 18 and 19 aren't cultural relics or marriage tips from a first-century advice column. They are a description of what ordinary life looks like when Jesus is genuinely Lord of a home. And that changes how we read them entirely.

The question worth sitting with today isn't whether you agree with Paul. It's whether Christ is actually Lord of your marriage — not in theory, but in practice. In the room. On the ordinary days.

#### Reflection Questions

- Where in your marriage have you kept Christ at arm's length — practically, not just theologically?
- What would it look like for your marriage to operate fully under the lordship of Christ this week?
- What assumptions about marriage have you carried in that you've never examined in light of Scripture?

**Practical Application** Sit down with your spouse this week and read Colossians 3:15–19 together out loud. Don't discuss it yet — just read it. Let it settle. Then ask each other one honest question: *Is there an area of our marriage where we've been operating by our own instincts rather than by what Scripture says?*

**Prayer** Father, I confess that I have been far too comfortable dividing my life into categories — keeping some things close to You and managing others on my own. Forgive me for treating my marriage as something separate from my faith. You are Lord of everything, and that means You are Lord here too — in my home, in my marriage, in the ordinary moments I don't think anyone is watching. I invite You into all of it. Not because I have it figured out, but because I trust that Your lordship is better than my management. Teach me what it means to do everything — including love my spouse — in the name of the Lord Jesus. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Day 2 — What Submission Actually Means

### A Wife's Faith in the Wisdom of God

**Scripture to Read:** Colossians 3:18, Ephesians 5:22–24, Genesis 2:18–25, Luke 22:42, Galatians 3:28

### Devotional

Few words in the English Bible carry more cultural baggage than the word *submit*. Mention it in a room full of people and you'll get a range of reactions — defensiveness, eye-rolls, quiet discomfort, or the occasional husband who suddenly looks a little too pleased with himself. None of those reactions are particularly helpful.

So before we can understand what Paul is calling wives to, we have to clear the ground of what he is not calling them to.

He is not calling wives to be less than their husbands. Genesis 1:27 is unmistakable — man and woman are equally made in the image of God. There is no hierarchy of worth, no difference in dignity or spiritual standing before God. Galatians 3:28 settles it: in Christ, there is no male or female in terms of value or standing before God. Paul knows this. He wrote both passages.

He is not calling wives to suppress their gifts, silence their voices, or check their competence at the door. The woman described in Proverbs 31 — the Bible's own portrait of a godly wife — is one of the most capable, initiative-taking, outward-facing people in all of Scripture. She is anything but passive.

What Paul is calling for is something specific and theological. The Greek word is *hupotassō* — a voluntary, self-directed ordering of oneself within a structure. Middle voice. Which means this is something a wife does, not something done to her. And the qualifier that makes all the difference is four words: *as is fitting in the Lord*. Not as Roman culture expects. Not as custom demands. In the Lord. Under the lordship of Christ. As an act of faith and discipleship.

A wife's submission is not a statement about her worth. It is a statement about her trust. Trust that Christ's design for marriage is good. Trust that His ordering of her life is wiser than the alternatives her culture is offering. That kind of trust — offered to an imperfect husband, in a fallen world, as an act of worship to Christ — is not weakness. It is one of the most courageous expressions of faith a woman can live out.

### Reflection Questions

- What has shaped your understanding of submission more — Scripture or culture?

- In what ways might submission, rightly understood, actually be an act of strength rather than weakness?
- How does knowing that Christ himself submitted to the Father — willingly, without inferiority — change how you think about this command?

**Practical Application** If you're a wife, spend a few minutes honestly asking yourself: *Where does my resistance to this command come from?* Write it down. Then take it to Scripture. Is the resistance rooted in a careful reading of God's Word — or in something else? If you're a husband, spend time today asking God to make you the kind of man your wife can trust enough to follow.

**Prayer** Father, I'll be honest — this command is not an easy one to sit with. The word submission carries a lot of weight, and some of that weight has been put there by people who misused it. But I don't want my understanding of Your Word to be shaped by how it's been abused. I want to understand what You actually mean. Give me the courage to read this honestly and the faith to trust that Your design for marriage is good — even when it is hard. Help me see that following You in this is not a diminishment of who I am. It is an act of worship. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Day 3 — The Command Husbands Didn't See Coming

### What Christlike Love Actually Costs

**Scripture to Read:** Colossians 3:19, Ephesians 5:25–30, 1 Peter 3:7, John 15:13, 1 Corinthians 13:4–7

### Devotional

If you were a husband in the first-century Greco-Roman world and someone handed you a copy of Colossians, you probably read verse 18 and nodded approvingly. *Wives, submit to your husbands.* Yes. Good. Carries on exactly as expected.

And then you hit verse 19.

*Husbands, love your wives.*

That might not sound radical to modern ears, but in Paul's world it was genuinely unprecedented. The household management literature of the day told husbands how to manage their households, how to govern their subordinates, how to maintain order. Nobody told husbands to love their wives. That simply wasn't the framework.

But Paul reaches for a word — *agapaō* — that reorders the entire picture. This isn't romantic love, though romance has its place. This isn't the warm feeling you have toward someone when things are going well. This is covenantal, purposive, self-giving love. The present imperative form means keep on loving — continuously, persistently, as a sustained orientation of your whole self toward the good of your wife. And then Paul gives husbands the standard: *as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*

The model is the cross. Let that land.

This love is incarnational — it enters her world, learns it, and serves it. It means knowing your wife well enough that your prayers for her have actual content. It means real presence, not just physical proximity. It means listening — not waiting for your turn to speak, but genuinely attending to what she is carrying.

This love is sacrificial — it chooses her preferences over your own, repeatedly, in the small moments that nobody celebrates. The daily dying that is far harder than any dramatic gesture.

This love is sanctifying — it is aimed not just at her happiness but at her flourishing before God. A husband who loves like this is helping his wife become more of who God intends her to be.

No husband reads these words and thinks, *nailed it.* That's the point. This is a call to something we can only sustain by the grace of the One whose love it imitates.

## Reflection Questions

- Which of the three dimensions of love — incarnational, sacrificial, sanctifying — is most challenging for you personally, and why?
- What would it look like practically to love your wife the way Christ loves the church this week?
- How does the cross reframe what it means to be the head of your home?

**Practical Application** Husbands — pick one concrete thing this week that reflects incarnational love. Not a grand gesture. Something small and specific that says *I know your world and I'm in it with you*. It might be taking something off her plate without being asked. It might be putting your phone down and actually listening. Small and sustained beats dramatic and occasional every time.

**Prayer** Father, I confess that I have loved my wife far more on my terms than on Yours. I have called it love when it was really convenience. I have called it leadership when it was really comfort-seeking. Forgive me. The standard You set in this passage — love as Christ loved the church — is one I cannot meet in my own strength. So I'm asking for Your grace. Not just to do better, but to be changed from the inside. Make me a man who loves his wife the way Christ loves His people — incarnationally, sacrificially, and with her good always in view. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# Day 4 — The Sin Nobody Talks About

## Bitterness, Harshness, and the Gospel's Answer

**Scripture to Read:** Colossians 3:19, Ephesians 4:31–32, Hebrews 12:15, Proverbs 14:29, James 1:19–20

### Devotional

Of all the commands in Colossians 3:18–4:1, Paul issues exactly one prohibition. One negative command in the entire household code. And he gives it to husbands: *do not be harsh with them*.

That specificity is worth pausing on. Paul could have said many things to husbands. He chose to name this. Which tells us something — he saw it as the characteristic and recurring failure of men in positions of authority in the home.

The Greek word is *pikrainō* — to embitter, to make something sour. The grammar suggests Paul may be addressing something already happening: *stop being bitter*. Not a hypothetical warning but a pastoral correction aimed at a real pattern.

It shows up in two forms. There is active harshness — the sharp word at the end of a long day, the cutting tone, the irritability that your coworkers never see but your wife experiences as the daily weather of your home. And there is passive harshness — the emotional withdrawal, the cold distance, the husband who is physically present but emotionally somewhere else entirely. Both are named. Both are prohibited.

But underneath the behavior is the bitterness itself — and bitterness has roots. It grows from disappointment that was never processed, from wounds that were never healed, from expectations that were never met and resentments that were quietly fed instead of mortified. Hebrews 12:15 warns that a root of bitterness, left unaddressed, causes trouble and defiles many. It rarely stays contained to one relationship.

The gospel doesn't offer behavior management here. It offers something deeper — the grace of a God who has absorbed every failure, covered every sin, and by His Spirit is capable of producing in a bitter man the patient, tender love of Christ. The same Christ who has never once grown bitter toward His church despite her long and messy history of failure.

That is the standard. And that is the grace available to every man who is honest enough to admit he needs it.

### Reflection Questions

- Is there bitterness toward your spouse that you have been nursing rather than bringing to Christ?

- What is the root of any harshness — active or passive — that shows up in your marriage?
- How does the patience and gentleness of Christ toward you personally challenge the way you treat your spouse?

**Practical Application** Take ten minutes today and honestly ask God to show you any bitterness you are carrying toward your spouse. Write down what surfaces. Then confess it specifically — not as a general "forgive me for being harsh" but naming the actual root. Bring it to the cross. And if an apology to your spouse is warranted, don't wait. Short accounts make for healthier marriages.

**Prayer** Father, I don't want to be a harsh person. But if I'm honest, I know there are ways I've let bitterness take root — in how I speak, in how I withdraw, in the resentment I've fed instead of released. Forgive me. I know You have never treated me with the harshness I sometimes show the people closest to me. You have been patient, gentle, and faithful even when I have not deserved it. I want to be changed — not just in my behavior but in my heart. Root out the bitterness. Replace it with the grace You have so freely given me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# Day 5 — One Sign, Two People

## What a Christian Marriage Says to the World

**Scripture to Read:** Colossians 3:17–19, Ephesians 5:31–33, Revelation 19:6–9, John 13:34–35, Genesis 2:24

### Devotional

Paul doesn't give us these commands in isolation. He gives them to a church. A gathered community of people trying to follow Jesus together in the middle of ordinary life. And when you read Colossians 3:18–19 in that context, something becomes clear — a Christian marriage is never just about the two people in it.

It is a sign.

Ephesians 5:32 makes it explicit. The mystery of marriage — a man and woman joined together as one flesh — points beyond itself to something greater: the relationship between Christ and His church. A husband's love for his wife is meant to image the love of Christ for His people. A wife's trust in her husband is meant to image the church's trust in Christ. Together, they declare something to the watching world about the nature of the gospel.

This is why the stakes of these two commands are higher than they appear. When a husband loves his wife with Christlike love — incarnational, sacrificial, sanctifying — he is not just being a good spouse. He is making an argument. A visible one. He is showing the world what it looks like when someone loves another person not because they deserve it, but because they have been captured by a love that works that way. And when a wife submits to her husband in the Lord — not out of cultural compliance but out of genuine trust in Christ's design — she is declaring that Jesus can be trusted with the ordering of a life.

Neither of you will do this perfectly. Not even close. Our marriages are imperfect signs, inconsistent witnesses, works very much still in progress. But that gap between the ideal and the reality is not a reason for despair. It is a reason for grace — and grace is exactly what Christ offers.

He does not come into your marriage to beat you up. He comes to expose what is broken, cover it with His grace, and teach you a better way to live together. That is the gospel at work in the most ordinary place it can reach — your home.

That is worth everything.

### Reflection Questions

- What does your marriage currently communicate to the people watching it — family, friends, neighbors, your children?
- How does seeing your marriage as a sign of the gospel change the way you approach its daily challenges?

- What is one area where you need to receive Christ's grace in your marriage rather than trying harder in your own strength?

### **Practical Application**

Sit down together as a couple and ask each other one question: *What is one thing I can do this week to love you better?* Then listen. Don't defend, explain, or deflect. Just listen — and then do the thing. Simple. Concrete. Repeated over a lifetime, this kind of intentional love is what builds a marriage worth having.

**Prayer** Father, thank You that You did not leave us to figure out marriage on our own. You gave us Your Word, Your Spirit, and the example of Christ's own love for His church. We confess that we have fallen short — individually and together. We have loved imperfectly, submitted reluctantly, and let bitterness take up more space than it should. Forgive us. Restore what has been worn down. Strengthen what is weak. And make our marriage — with all its imperfection — into something that points beyond itself to You. We want our home to be a place where Your lordship is real, Your grace is evident, and Your love is on display. Not for our reputation. For Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.