

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 3:18-19

THE SIMPLE SECRET TO A HAPPY MARRIAGE



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

Problem

Marriage is in trouble.

- It is being re-defined (man-man, woman-woman, polygamy, polyamory)
- It is being delayed (average age for marriage is now 30)
- It is being broken up (almost 50% of marriages in the US end in divorce)

It's not just marriage in general that is in trouble; your own marriage may be in trouble. Or perhaps you're unmarried but

you've seen so many troubled marriages that you've decided, "Not for me." "Or if you do go forward, you're pessimistic about it working out long-term.

Solution?

Marriage is in trouble. But in these verses God offers us a simple fix. He lets us in on the simple secret to a happy marriage. Before we discover that secret, let's try to understand why these verses come here in Colossians.

CONTEXT

In chapters 1-2, the Apostle Paul laid the theological foundation for Christian ethics. We can sum it up like this: A complete Christ makes for a complete Christian. The fullness of Christ fills the Christian full.

In chapter 3, the Apostle begins to work that theology out into practice. He's teaching how the complete Christ changes our complete life. In verses 1-17, he's been showing how the complete Christian has a completely new ethic. But, so far, the discussion has been largely general and abstract: he's been talking about love, peace, forgiveness, humility, etc.

In 3:18-4:1, he gets much more specific, concrete, detailed, and personal as he translates these Christian qualities and characteristics into the everyday life of relationships. He's answering the question, "How does the Christian's completeness in Christ completely change their relationships? He starts with the closest relationship (husband and wife), moves on to parents and children, and finishes with employers and employees. Why does he do this? Because sin has filled our relationships with problems, but Christ fills our relationships with peace.

If your marriage has already broken or is breaking, remember as a Christian you are still complete in Christ. Your identity is not "broken marriage" but "complete in Christ." If a loved one's marriage has broken up, or if a loved one is in a same-sex relationship, your identity is not "shamed and embarrassed" but "complete in Christ." If you are being tempted into unbiblical relationships, remember, they will never complete or fill you. Only Christ can complete and fill you.

Paul's society was broken too, and broken relationships were common in his culture. But he still taught God's Word. But notice, he did so after chapters full of the fullness of Christ. The Gospel comes first. The Gospel is the foundation and fullness of marriage.



**Where does this relational peace begin?
It begins with God's definition of marriage**



1. A HAPPY MARRIAGE IS DEFINED BY GOD

There are three very basic points in verses 18-19.

- A husband is a man
- A wife is a woman
- A man can only marry a woman (and vice versa)

APPLICATION

This is not conservatism: This is biblical Christianity. It's the teaching of the inspired and inerrant Word of God. We cannot set this aside, replace it, and think things will get better. Exhibit A: Our society and culture.

This is not cruel: Sometimes the biblical teaching on marriage is portrayed as harsh, unyielding, hateful, homophobic, transphobic. "How can you limit love?" they protest. Have a look at the statistics I've supplied in the Further Study section

of these notes to discover how much misery follows the abandonment of God's definition of marriage. Although the media will never tell you this, the rates of depression and suicide are far higher for those who abandon God's definition of marriage.

But, accepting the divine design and definition of marriage is not enough for a happy marriage as the evidence proves. Why is that? It's because marriage has one massive challenge.

2. A HAPPY MARRIAGE HAS ONE MAIN CHALLENGE

The challenge is selfishness, also known as self-centeredness, self-focus, or self-serving. Lots of different expressions for the same thing: **me-first**. I say that because God prescribes the opposite in these verses: selflessness, other-focus, other-serving, other-first. We'll look at the solution in a moment, but let me briefly address selfishness.

Selfishness is the root of unhappiness. The world says, "Independence is the fastest route to happiness. Freedom from others will make your life worth living. Live by yourself and for yourself. That's the way to a happy life. Autonomy, being a law to yourself, is the only life worth living. How's that working out for you? For the world?"

Selfishness has two rotten fruits. First, wives don't respect or honor their husbands. Second, husbands don't love or care for their wives. Different fruits, but they both grow on the same tree of selfishness.

APPLICATION

"Yes, lack of respect, that's the problem in my marriage. How do I get my wife to change to make me happier?" Or "Yes, lack of love is the problem in my marriage. How do I get my husband to

change to make me happier?" These self-centered questions reveal the problem of selfishness is not one-sided. So what question should we be asking?



So what question should I be asking?



3. A HAPPY MARRIAGE HAS ONE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT

The right question is “How do I change to make my spouse happy?” That's selflessness and it's required of both men and women, though in different ways. Each has to give up first place though in different ways.

The wife gives up self-will (18)

“Submission” sounds horrendous to our ears. It conjures up pictures of slavery, abuse, servility, and inferiority. Biblical submission is very different.

Submission starts with equality: It's not based upon a superior/inferior relationship but upon an equal relationship. Men and women are essentially equal in dignity, value, gifts, intellect, and spirituality. Whatever follows is built upon this foundation and we must never move away from it. Marriage involves two equals in which, for the good of the relationship, one submits to the other.

Submission was perfect in a perfect world: God made two equal partners, but by the order he created them in (man first), he designated a functional order (1 Tim. 2:13). Essentially, they were equal; functionally, Eve followed Adam.

Submission is voluntary: Submission must never involve coercion, intimidation, or fear. It's a willing, freely-chosen, deliberate, thoughtful submission. The wife, while maintaining her essential equality, selflessly chooses to give up her functional equality, for the sake of better functioning of the marriage.

Submission is not submission to sin. No wife is obliged to do anything contrary to Scripture at her husband's command, nor suffer anything contrary to Scripture at her husband's hand. This is why the Apostle says, “As is fitting in the Lord.” Her ultimate submission is to the Lord, not to her husband.

Submission does not mean no discussion. Any husband who has an ounce of common sense and spiritual wisdom will realize that his wife is a treasure trove of advice and counsel and will ask for it. Giving up her will does not mean giving up her opinions. It means that after thorough discussion and debate, if there is still disagreement, the wife submits her will: “My will is second, your will is first.”

Submission is freeing. The right kind of submission is incredibly releasing and freeing. It promotes unity and harmony in the relationship and in the home. It creates a soil in which both the man and the woman can grow and thrive with joy.

Submission is Christ-like. If you think, “This is beneath me. This is demeaning,” consider how Jesus Christ gave up his will when he came to this earth. “As is fitting in the Lord” can also mean, “As matches what Jesus did.” He maintained essential equality while submitting to his Father's authority for the sake of his people (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38).



**So the wife gives up her self-will. What does the husband give up?
He gives up his self-love.**



The husband gives up self-love (19)

Love is primarily action. Love is the most amazing feeling. To be attracted to someone of the other sex, to sense the power of attraction, to enjoy romantic intimacy. All of these things are wonderful feelings, but can be pursued for totally selfish reasons. In the Bible, love is primarily about doing, caring, helping, and giving to another. It's the giving of one's entire self for the good of another. That brings us to another "S" word that's not very popular today: **Sacrifice**. This is not a "falling in love kind of love" but a "Calvary kind of love."

Love is Christ-like. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). The Son so loved the world that he gave his only life. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Eph. 5:25).

Love is giving freely. Like submission, sacrifice is not a duty but a pleasure. It's not so much an obligation but an opportunity (1 Cor. 13). The most important question in marriage is not "What can I get out of it?" but "What can I give?"

- When you argue: What can I give up to resolve this?
- When you've hurt her: What apology can I give to heal this?
- When budgeting: What can I give up this month to give her more money?
- When talking: How can I give her more of a listening ear?
- When she's depressed: How can I give her encouragement?
- When she's lost sleep: How can I give her rest?

Give your mind, heart, eyes, hands, body, money, time, attention, affection. Give financially, emotionally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually. Give yourself away.

Love is the opposite of bitterness. A harsh or bitter spirit is a taking spirit, it's a miserly spirit. It's a rude, cold, hard spirit. It asks, "How can I punish?" When irritated, frustrated and exasperated, it asks, "How can I get back and take back?"

Love benefits the loved. Sacrifice is giving up one's own well-being for the well-being of another. A dictator does not do that.

APPLICATION

Ask the right question: "How can I get her to obey me?" is the wrong question. "How can I love her better?" is the right question. "How can I get him to put me first?" is the wrong question. "How can I submit to him?" is the right question. Giving up self-will is much easier where there is a giving up of self-love (and vice versa).

Focus on giving not getting: Both have to give. Both have to give up first place. Both give up in different ways. The wife gives up self-will; the husband gives up self-love. Both give up self. Both become selfless, but in different ways. When each party is focused more on giving than getting, the result is more getting for both parties. In marriage too, it is "more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

CONCLUSION



PRAYER: Selfless Savior, save me from selfishness and give me a selfless heart that will give up first place for the good of my marriage.

FURTHER STUDY

Online Articles

- [What's the Point of Marriage? Three Books and Some Thoughts](#)
- [Three Ways the Gospel Changes Marriage](#) by Erik Raymond
- [Two is Better than One. Who Knew?](#)
- [Study Finds More Reasons to Get and Stay Married](#)
- [Family Structure Study](#)

Books

- [The Meaning of Marriage](#) by Tim Keller
- [Friends and Lovers: Cultivating Companionship and Intimacy in Marriage](#) by Joel Beeke
- [Married for God: Making Your Marriage the Best it Can be](#) by Christopher Ash

Discussion Questions

1. How would you argue for God's definition of marriage?
2. What are the other challenges that face marriage today?
3. What do you do if your spouse refuses to be selfless?
4. What are bad examples of submission in marriage?
5. Read [this article](#) on decision-making in marriage? What would you change in the article? What can you change in your marriage?
6. What would a non-Christian learn about the Gospel from watching your marriage?

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COMPLETE IN CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 3:18-19

THE SIMPLE SECRET TO A HAPPY MARRIAGE



Marriage is failing

- Redefined
- Delayed
- Broken

Biblical answer?



A happy marriage is defined by God

- A husband is a man
- A wife is a woman
- A man can only marry a woman (and vice versa)

GOD DESIGNED MARRIAGE.
SO HE DEFINES MARRIAGE.

Why is this not enough?



A happy marriage has one main challenge

- Selfishness is the root of unhappiness
- Selfishness has two rotten fruits.

SELFISHNESS HAS ROTTEN ROOTS
AND ROTTEN FRUITS

What's the right question?



A happy marriage has one essential ingredient

- The self-less wife gives up self-will
- The self-less husband gives up self-love

YOU WILL FIND
PERSONAL HAPPINESS
WHEN YOU PUT OTHERS'
HAPPINESS FIRST

Action?



Be selfless for a
Gospel-shaped
happy marriage

