

# Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

## Topic 29 – The Wife’s Role in Marriage

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### Introduction

We have seen that problems in marriage can be traced to the first marital failures and subsequent curses imposed by God on Adam and Eve and their descendants at the Fall from sinlessness. Specifically, problems in marriage stem from the failure to live out the Biblical roles for the husband and wife that were the center of the failure at the Fall.

For the wife, we saw that Eve failed to follow her husband in respectful submission (Gen 3). She failed to submit to Adam (and ultimately God) and disobeyed God’s word. The curse on Eve and her descendents was a struggle to dominate, master, enslave her husband.

<sup>16</sup>To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; **Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you.**”  
Gen 3:16

<sup>7</sup>If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up? And if you do not do well, **sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.**” Gen 4:7

Almost all people who enter in marriage hope to live happily ever after. It does not take long into the “ever after” to realize not every moment will be “happy”. When happiness is elusive, couples can begin to ask, “How can I be happy?”. Unfortunately, this is the wrong question to be asking. The correct question is, “How may I honor and glorify God in my circumstances?” Last week we looked at how the husband can honor God in his marriage. Today we will look at how the wife can honor God in her marriage.

### Submission

The word “submission” when used in the marriage context is off-limits in some circles. Even among Bible believing Christians, it can seem like an antiquated concept. However, Paul through the Spirit makes it clear that submission in relationships is a key characteristic of Spirit-filled believers.

#### ❖ **How does the world view Biblical teaching on marriage? What about you?**

The filling of the Spirit (being controlled by the Spirit as the believer forsakes all other masters and bows before the Lord allowing Christ’s words to richly dwell within him/her) results in God honoring words (Eph 5:19), worship (Eph 5:19), reactions (Eph 5:20), and relationships (Eph 5:21-6:9). A demonstrated character quality of Spirit-filled believers is submission.

<sup>18</sup>And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but **be filled with the Spirit,** <sup>19</sup>speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; <sup>20</sup>always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; <sup>21</sup>**and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.** Eph 5:18-21

#### ❖ **Are you living consistently above the line?**

“Be subject” is a compound word meaning literally to “place under in an orderly fashion”. It is in the present tense and middle voice which calls for a continual subjection that is voluntary or willing.

Submission is not a new concept for believers. Spirit-filled believers willingly come under those who God has placed over them. The Scriptures call believers to submit to governing authorities (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17), children to parents (Eph 6:1; Col 3:20), the church to its elders (1 Peter 5:1-5; Heb 13:17), employees to employers (Eph 6:5-8; Col 3:22-25), etc.

#### ❖ **Do you consider how God would have you to submit in various areas of life?**

Mutual submission is a key to all relationships.

<sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; <sup>4</sup>do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Phil 2:3-4

Submission is not the same as obey. Submission is an attitude from which obedience springs; an attitude of compliance and deference that is not necessarily present in obedience.

### ❖ **How is your attitude of submission?**

Before we move on to the wife's role of submission in marriage, we will look at what the Bible says about gender distinctives.

#### Gender Equality and Distinctives

The Scriptures declare that male and female are equal in nature, personhood, dignity, and worth.

<sup>27</sup>God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Gen 1:27

In addition, the Scriptures are clear that men and women have equal access to salvation and in terms of their position in Christ are equal.

<sup>26</sup>For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup>For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, **there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** Gal 3:26-28

Throughout the Bible women are equal in the nature of their ministry. Women played a prominent role in the ministry of Jesus and ministry to Jesus (Matt 28:1-10; Luke 8:3; 23:49; John 11:1-46; 12:1-8). No spiritual gift is limited to men in the lists in the NT (1 Cor 12:27-31; Rom 12:3-8; 1 Pet 4:8-11) and women were commanded to edify the body of Christ, which included teaching (Titus 2:4) and prophecy (Acts 2:17-18; 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5).

### ❖ **How do you view the opposite sex?**

Yet, the Scriptures are clear that within the church and the home, men and women are to function in specifically designed roles. Jesus (Matt 19:3-8) and Paul (1 Tim 2:11-15) both reference the creation account as the foundation for their teaching on gender distinctives. In order to understand the NT teaching of gender roles we must first visit the creation account since gender roles are a part of God's original design. It is clear that the teaching on female submission applied to the church and home has a theological foundation, not cultural.

1. Adam was created first then Eve.

<sup>13</sup>For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. 1 Tim 2:13 (cf Gen 2:7)

2. God created Adam directly from the dust, He formed the woman out of the man.

<sup>3</sup>But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. ... <sup>7</sup>For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup>For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; 1 Cor 11:3; 7-8 (cf Gen 2:21-23)

3. God created the woman for the man.

<sup>9</sup>for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. 1 Cor 11:9 (cf Gen 2:18)

4. God gave commands to Adam not Eve.

<sup>16</sup>The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; <sup>17</sup>but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." Gen 2:16-17

5. God named Adam and Adam exercised his God-given leadership in naming Eve.

<sup>23</sup>The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." ... <sup>20</sup>Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. Gen 2:23; 3:20

6. The gender roles were reversed when Adam followed Eve into sin.

<sup>6</sup>When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, **she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.** Gen 3:6

7. After the fall God called out to Adam as responsible, not Eve (even though Eve ate first).

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned-- Rom 5:12 (cf Gen 3:8-9)

8. The curse highlighted the new struggle with the original order that men and women would have – male oppression and female rebellion.

<sup>16</sup>To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; **Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you.**" Gen 3:16

<sup>7</sup>"If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and **its desire is for you, but you must master it.**" Gen 4:7

With the understanding that God's ordained roles have a theological foundation, we will now look at submission within the family. Continuing in Ephesians 5, (and looking at the parallel passage in Colossians) Paul goes on to say that the way husbands submit to their wives is through loving, servant leadership and the wife's role in submission is to be subject to her husband as to Christ.

<sup>22</sup>**Wives, be subject to your own husbands**, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. <sup>24</sup>But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. Eph 5:22-24

<sup>18</sup>**Wives, be subject to your husbands**, as is fitting in the Lord. Col 3:18

❖ **What first comes to your mind when you read that you are to be subject to your husband?**

"Subject" does not mean "obedient". It means to "place under in an orderly fashion"; to set something in place under something else. It refers to two who are equal before God, but one places themselves in subjection to the other. The wife is to subject herself continually (present tense) to her own husband. The wife makes a choice to place herself as an equal underneath another equal, her husband, in order that there can be order in the family. The purpose is to obey God and function in the design that He has ordered. The wife's submission to the husband is not based on the husband's worthiness, but on God's design (1 Pet 3:1-7; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19).

❖ **Are you committed to be a doer of God's word?**

Let's look at some aspects of submission.

Submission honors and glorifies God.

<sup>3</sup>Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, <sup>4</sup>so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, <sup>5</sup>to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, **being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.** Titus 2:3-5

❖ **Is the most important thing in your life God's glory?**

Submission is to be continual and voluntary (willing) – it is a choice.

<sup>22</sup>Wives, **be subject** to your own husbands, as to the Lord. Eph 5:22

❖ **What do you hope to accomplish when you choose to not submit to your husband?**

Submission is to the wife's own husband, not to others.

<sup>22</sup>Wives, **be subject to your own husbands**, as to the Lord. Eph 5:22

❖ **Do you choose other people's advise over your husband's wishes?**

Submission is about submitting to Christ, maintaining Him as first not the husband.

<sup>22</sup>Wives, **be subject** to your own husbands, **as to the Lord.** Eph 5:22

<sup>18</sup>He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that **He Himself will come to have first place in everything.** Col 1:18

❖ **What do you place above the Lord; specifically above submitting to your husband?**

Submission is based on Christ's command not on the husband's worthiness.

<sup>24</sup>But as the church is **subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.** Eph 5:24

❖ **Will you obey God even if you don't feel like it?**

Submission trusts God.

<sup>5</sup>For in this way in former times the holy women also, **who hoped in God**, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; <sup>6</sup>just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you **do what is right without being frightened by any fear.** 1 Pet 3:5-6

❖ **Will you trust God enough to submit?**

Submission is all encompassing.

<sup>24</sup>But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives **ought to be to their husbands in everything.** Eph 5:24

❖ **Are there limitations on your submission?**

Submission obeys God before the husband.

<sup>18</sup>Wives, be subject to your husbands, **as is fitting in the Lord.** Col 3:18

<sup>29</sup>But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29

For example: participating in evil (Eph 5:11-12); not gathering with other believers (Heb 10:25); not teaching children about God (Eph 6:1-4); committing immorality (1 Cor 6:20); lying or cheating (Eph 4:25). In some cases it will be necessary to simply say "no" (Dan 3); in other cases the example of Daniel' creative obedience (Dan 1) can be applied.

Submission manifests itself in continual respect, treating with esteem.

<sup>33</sup>Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the **wife must see to it that she respects her husband.** Eph 5:33

❖ **What is your respect for your husband based on?**

Submission is still having something important to say.

<sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Col 3:16

<sup>26</sup>She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. Prov 31:26

<sup>8</sup>Hear, my son, your father's instruction And do not forsake your mother's teaching; Prov 1:8

❖ **Do you strive to use wisdom in your speech?**

Submission is influencing the husband in a Biblical way.

– Filled with the Spirit

<sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Col 3:16

<sup>18</sup>And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

<sup>19</sup>speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; Eph 5:18-19

❖ **Are you walking in the Spirit?**

– With behavior that speaks louder than words

<sup>1</sup>In the same way, you wives, **be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,** <sup>2</sup>as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

<sup>3</sup>Your adornment must not be *merely* external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; <sup>4</sup>but **let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.** 1 Peter 3:1-4

❖ **Does your behavior lead your words or the other way around?**

– With peace and goodness

<sup>17</sup>**Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.** Respect what is right in the sight of all men. <sup>18</sup>**If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.** <sup>19</sup>Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. <sup>20</sup>“But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” <sup>21</sup>**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** Rom 12:17-21

❖ **Is your heart vengeful?**

- With God honoring speech

<sup>19</sup>It is better to live in a desert land Than with a contentious and vexing woman. Prov 21:19 (see also Prov 21:9; 25:24; 27:15-16)

<sup>1</sup>A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger. Prov 15:1

<sup>21</sup>The wise in heart will be called understanding, And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness. Prov 16:21

<sup>12</sup>*Like* an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise reprover to a listening ear. Prov 25:12

<sup>15</sup>but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, Eph 4:15

#### ❖ Do you keep your tongue under control?

### Love

When we think of “love” in the Bible, we most often think of “agape” love – the sacrificial commitment of my will to another’s needs and best interests regardless of the cost to myself. All believers are commanded to love others.

<sup>12</sup>“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. John 15:12

<sup>11</sup>Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. 1 John 4:11-12

#### ❖ Do you give of yourself sacrificially even to those who are not lovely?

Just as the husband is to love his wife, the wife is to sacrificially serve her husband. Yet there is another kind of “love”.

<sup>3</sup>Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, <sup>4</sup>**so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands**, to love their children, <sup>5</sup>*to be* sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. Titus 2:3-5

The delineation of “young” and “old” is most likely determined by children rearing. If a woman is still raising children, she is considered “young”; if she is finished raising children, she is considered “old”. “Love their husbands” is an adjective meaning to be “fond of husband”. The verb “to be” is in the present tense and active voice. The women were to be continually fond of their husbands. The active voice signifies that the wife is to exhibit a willing determined love that is not based on a husband’s worthiness but on God’s instructions for order in the home.

Another way to say this is to be “devoted” to their husband. The husband should be the wife’s primary human relationship and vice versa. The wife’s goal is her husband’s benefit, not her own. She is to put her husband’s welfare before her own.

<sup>10</sup>An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. <sup>11</sup>The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain. <sup>12</sup>**She does him good and not evil All the days of her life.** Prov 31:10-12

#### ❖ Are you fond of your husband?

#### ❖ Are you devoted to your husband?

#### ❖ Why might it be important for young women to be continually devoted to their husbands? Are you?

## Home Ministry

Among conservative Christians there tends to be a “Leave it to Beaver” mindset regarding the wife’s role in the home. This is most likely perpetuated by culture and preconceptions read into certain Bible passages. Unfortunately, many distort Scripture to fit their own stereotypes.

<sup>3</sup>Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, <sup>4</sup>so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, <sup>5</sup>*to be* sensible, pure, **workers at home**, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. Titus 2:3-5

“Workers at home” means to be devoted to home duties, preoccupied with domestic affairs. The idea is that she is “caring for the home” and a producer of orderliness and care in the home. A similar command is given in 1 Timothy:

<sup>14</sup>Therefore, I want younger *widows* to get married, bear children, **keep house**, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; 1 Tim 5:14

The Scriptures are clear that a wife is to be a “worker at home” or “keep house”. This does not mean that she cannot work outside the home. It simply means that her primary responsibility is to the family. We could simply look at Proverbs 31:10-31 to see how much work the Scriptural stereotypical wife/mother is doing in and outside the home.

### ❖ **To what are you devoted?**

## The Christ-Like Wife of a Non-Believing Husband

There are several ways a Christian wife may find herself married to an unbeliever: she comes to Christ after they are married, she marries a professing believer who later denies Christ, or she was immature or rebellious when she married an unbeliever. Regardless, the Scriptures speak to this.

1. If the unbelieving husband consents to remain in the marriage, then the believing wife should remain married. She must not “endure” the marriage, but strive on her part to glorify God in the marriage. Her husband and children are in a special place to not only hear the gospel, but to see it in action.

<sup>12</sup>But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. <sup>13</sup>And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. <sup>14</sup>For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. 1 Cor 7:12-14

### ❖ **Are you striving to glorify God in your marriage?**

2. Live the gospel. The most intimate of human relationship is a place which allows the gospel to shine in the most magnificent ways.

<sup>1</sup>In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, <sup>2</sup>as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. 1 Pet 3:1-2

The most effective ministry to a husband who is “disobedient to the word” (could mean believers or unbelievers) is his wife’s behavior. Therefore, the wife should strive to grow in her relationship with Christ.

### ❖ **Are you striving to grow in your relationship with Christ?**

3. Pray for your husband and have others pray for you (but be careful).

<sup>1</sup>Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation. Rom 10:1

<sup>2</sup>Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of thanksgiving*;  
<sup>3</sup>praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;  
<sup>4</sup>that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. Col 4:2-4

- ❖ **What might happen if you tell your Christians friends all about your unbelieving husband?**

### **Real Life Scenarios**

*Yourself #1:* You and your husband have been married ~5 years and in that time you have gotten deeper and deeper in debt. Each month it is difficult to make ends meet and it causes a great deal of stress on your marriage. You personally don't spend money on extravagant things, but as a family you own a toy hauler, dirt bikes, wave runners, and the big truck to pull it all. All these things were bought by your husband without your input on a whim. What should you be focusing on regarding your relationship with your husband? What attitude would most glorify God? What would be a God honoring way you could respond to this situation?

*Yourself #2:* You have given your husband a long honey-do list. Most of the things don't matter to him, but they would make your life a little easier. Of course he never gets to the list, but seems to have enough time to watch football all weekend. What heart attitude would most glorify God in this situation? What could be a God honoring way to address this with your husband?

*Yourself #3:* You feel that being home with your young children just isn't for you. You have prayed about it and are at peace with going back to work believing this to be God's will for you. However, your husband is against this, not wanting to put the kids in childcare. What do you do? What is God's will for you in this situation?

*Yourself #4:* Your husband has a decent job, but in your mind he could be so much more. You are friends with many of his coworker's wives. Their husbands are ambitious and in the last years have been seeking and gaining promotions. You find yourself thinking badly about your husband, blaming him for not having the things that your friends have. In fact, there are times where you belittle him for his lack of ambition (but of course you would never do that in public). What is the first thing you need to do? What heart attitude would honor God? What are ways you could respond in a God honoring way moving forward?

*Someone Else #1:* A friend at work is a Christian, but her husband is not a believer. They own a business that does a lot of cash business. Your friend does the books and her husband pressures her to lie to the IRS regarding the business' profits. She is struggling with how to submit to her husband and also honor God. Where would you begin to share God's word with her?

*Someone Else #2:* Your best friend's husband has just been given a great job opportunity, but it is in a different state. He wants to take the job, believing that this will allow him to provide better for the family. He hopes to one day return to CA, but that may not happen. Your friend is a Christian, but does not want to move away from family, friends, and church. How would you begin to share God's word with your friend? What would you tell her is her responsibility before God?

### **Conclusion**

The godly Christian wife is a woman who submits to her husband because God calls her to. She responds to her husband respectfully and strives to have a heart attitude of fondness toward him. Her primary responsibility is the family.

## Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

### Topic 29 – Wife’s Roles in Marriage – Additional Study

Read Ephesians 5:18-33 and Colossians 3:16-18 asking God to show you ways in which you are not submitting to your husband. Note them here:

For each of these ways, instead of submitting, how do you respond?

What would be a way to honor God in each of those situations?

Read Titus. For Titus 2:3-5, in what ways do you show your husband fondness? Brainstorm other ways you could demonstrate fondness, not for you or his sake, but to honor Christ.

Read Proverbs 31:10-31 below. Underline all the ways in which the excellent wife serves her family. How could you be more like this excellent wife?

<sup>10</sup>An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.

<sup>11</sup>The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain.

<sup>12</sup>She does him good and not evil All the days of her life.

<sup>13</sup>She looks for wool and flax And works with her hands in delight.

<sup>14</sup>She is like merchant ships; She brings her food from afar.

<sup>15</sup>She rises also while it is still night And gives food to her household And portions to her maidens.

<sup>16</sup>She considers a field and buys it; From her earnings she plants a vineyard.

<sup>17</sup>She girds herself with strength And makes her arms strong.

<sup>18</sup>She senses that her gain is good; Her lamp does not go out at night.

<sup>19</sup>She stretches out her hands to the distaff, And her hands grasp the spindle.

<sup>20</sup>She extends her hand to the poor, And she stretches out her hands to the needy.

<sup>21</sup>She is not afraid of the snow for her household, For all her household are clothed with scarlet.

<sup>22</sup>She makes coverings for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple.

<sup>23</sup>Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land.

<sup>24</sup>She makes linen garments and sells *them*, And supplies belts to the tradesmen.

<sup>25</sup>Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future.

<sup>26</sup>She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

<sup>27</sup>She looks well to the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness.

<sup>28</sup>Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband *also*, and he praises her, *saying*:

<sup>29</sup>“Many daughters have done nobly, But you excel them all.”

<sup>30</sup>Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, *But* a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

<sup>31</sup>Give her the product of her hands, And let her works praise her in the gates. Prov 31:10-31