

Spiritually Vital Families (Colossians 3:18-21)

Last week we finished with verse 17.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

There we find a fundamental principle for Christians. If you are to be Christ's disciple, you need to be committed to His service. In everything we do, we need approach it as if we are doing it for Jesus because we are. This is not just a church thing. This is in every phase of our life. Whether you are at work, at home, out having fun, everything is to be done in a way that it brings glory to our King. This is our reasonable service. It is how we express our thanks and our love to the One who has done so much for us.

Jesus rescued you from hell. He did so at great personal sacrifice. So whatever we do in word or deed, let us do it for Jesus!

Beginning with verse 18, Paul is going to give us some very concrete, practical examples of what this kind of life looks like. He is going to show us how we can glorify Christ in our families. I'm sure you want to have spiritually vital families. I suspect all of us fall short of the Biblical model but by God's grace, and with the Spirit's help, this is what we need to be striving for.

And yes, we are going to encounter the dreaded "s" word this morning. Submit; submission. The last time I preached on this concept, it was from the book of Ephesians. I took a little heat. That's okay; I'm willing to take a few shots if I have to but I must not compromise what the Bible says and what the Bible means.

The reason I took heat is that we have a warped concept of what the Bible means by "submit". We have a tendency to look at this word and to look at this concept from the perspective of fallen humanity. So before we get to our text this morning, I want to take you all the way back to the beginning. I want to show you, remind you of God's original design for the family. I want to show you what went wrong.

Turn to Genesis, Chapter 2, verse 18.

And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." (Genesis 2:18)

The word "helper" is the Hebrew *'ezer*. It shows up 21 times in the Old Testament and most of them refer to God Himself.

*Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our **help** and our shield. (Psalms 33:20)*

God is our *ezer*, and the woman is man's *ezer*. God did not create a slave for Adam to dominate. He created a help-mate. He created a woman who would complete him, who would supply what he lacked, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

You probably know the story. God put Adam to sleep and used one of his ribs to fashion Eve. And when he woke up:

And Adam 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." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:23-24)

God instituted marriage. He conceived of it. He designed it. And if He is honored, He will greatly bless it. Husband and wife are to be one flesh, one unit – a team, living life

in perfect symbiosis, each supplying what the other cannot supply, enjoying one another in a physical, emotional and spiritual union, having the kind of fellowship modeled by the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That was God’s design.

But then, something went wrong and sin entered the world and the marriage relationship was cursed along with the rest of creation. Flip over to Genesis, chapter 3, verse 16:

To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you." (Genesis 3:16)

Now remember, this is God pronouncing a curse to Grandma Eve. This is not God commanding how things should be. God is telling her how things will be as a result of their cosmic treason. “Your desire shall be for your husband” implies that because of sin, the woman will want to dominate and control her husband. She will have this urge to call all the shots and her desires will be based on her own perceived needs. In other words, they will be selfishly motivated.

“And he shall rule over you.” Implies not a benign leadership, but a dictatorial kind of rule. Instead of being a comparable companion, husbands will have the tendency to be tyrants, to treat their wives as slaves, as possessions, as a means to their own selfish ends. Again, this is not as it should be according to God’s design. It is part of the curse.

The image of God has been defaced in humankind. Now, it has not been completely erased so even non-believers can rise above these selfish desires to a degree. But I am absolutely convinced that this is the root cause of all marital discord and it is why so many women across the world are treated horribly by their husbands.

Jesus Christ came to earth to restore a right relationship with our God and consequently, He is also in the business of restoring right relationships between husband and wife. The result of the curse has generally been the subjugation of women. Wherever Christianity has taken hold, the plight of women has improved, not perfected, but at least closer to God’s original design.

Now, let’s move to the New Testament, 1 Corinthians, chapter 7 beginning with verse 3:

Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. (1 Corinthians 7:3-4)

Paul is primarily addressing the sexual relationship, but the principle is valid in all areas of a godly marriage. Whether you are a husband or a wife, you need to be primarily concerned with the needs of your spouse. You are to be other-centered rather than self-centered. We need to be ...

... submitting to one another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:21)

And as Paul writes to the Philippians:

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:4)

This applies to all relationships, but especially to family relationships. We are to submit to one another. We are to do our best to provide what our spouses need. It is the husband’s responsibility and it is also the wife’s.

With that in mind, let’s now go to our text.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Colossians 3:18-21)

Well ladies, it seems you're first. I wondered about that as I studied this week. Why are the wives mentioned first here and also in Ephesians, chapter 5? I think it is because as wives and mothers, you are absolutely vital to a properly functioning family. You are central; You are really, really important. Remember, you are not designed as a slave to your husband; you are a helpmate. You provide what your husband cannot adequately provide by himself.

In doing so, it clearly says you are to submit to your own husband. Your husband has the responsibility of providing spiritual leadership for the family. This has nothing at all to do with rank or worth because in the kingdom of God ...

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

There is no diversity of rank or importance but there is a diversity of roles. Your husband was designed to fill the role of leadership. You need to respect that role. You need to encourage him as he struggles to fulfill that role.

It is not at all easy for us husbands. We are stained by the fall and our natural, fleshly instinct is to be horribly self-centered. Our tendency is to either become dictatorial or to withdraw. In any case, when we fall short of fulfilling that God-ordained role of spiritual leadership, your natural tendency is to criticize.

Your desire shall be for your husband.

Your natural, fleshly desire is to try to take over, to dominate.

Well, men respond poorly when they feel disrespected. We do, and as much as you might like to, you cannot control your husband. The best you can do is to influence him in a positive way. Encourage him. Offer suggestions but do so with a non-critical spirit. Find out how you can come along side and support him in his leadership role.

But always remember that in God's economy, you are not a doormat. You are of infinite worth. You are the very heart of a spiritually vital family.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (Colossians 3:18)

We must all remember that greatness in the Kingdom of God is not defined by position, prestige or power, but by service. When James and John brought their mother to Jesus to finagle a higher rank, Jesus said ...

.... whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:26-28)

Okay fellas, it's your turn! Verse 18 must not be taken independently from verse 19. Guys, don't you dare pull it out of context and use it as some sort of hammer against your own wives. To have a spiritually vital family, everyone has to pull their own weight, to fulfill their God-given responsibility.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. (Colossians 3:19)

Men, you are responsible for the spiritual leadership of your family. And the very first bullet point of your job description is to love your wife. The word for love is *agapeo* in the Greek. It is a self-sacrificial love. It is the sort of love that provides what is needed unconditionally. It is the sort of love God has for us, the sort of love that sent Jesus to the cross while we were yet sinners.

In Ephesians 5:28, Paul writes:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, (Ephesians 5:25)

That is a really high standard, guys. You need to be willing to go to the cross for your wife. You need to be willing to sacrifice everything for her.

Now, just as guys behave badly when they don't feel respected, wives can behave badly when they don't feel loved. When they don't feel loved, they often respond with disrespect. And then their husbands respond badly. It's a crazy cycle that can do much harm.

Love your wives! It is not nearly enough to profess your love on your wedding day and advise her that you'll let her know if you change your mind. You need to demonstrate your love in concrete ways every day. Don't just tell her; show her. Take time to listen ... really listen to her. Find out how you can help her. Find out how you can serve her. Find out how you can meet her greatest needs. And just get over yourself and do it.

Scripture says we are not to be bitter toward our wives. What does that mean? First of all, we are not to be tyrants; we are to be servants. Don't ever try to rule your wife with an iron fist like you are some petty dictator. Don't denigrate your wife in front of your buddies. I cringe when I hear some guy referring to his wife as his "old lady", or worse. When it comes to your spouse, the only "b" word you should ever use is "bride".

Your wife is a precious gift from God. Never deny her the affection, the care, the provision, the protection, and the assistance she needs and deserves. And don't you even think about striking her or causing her physical harm. That is an abomination in the sight of God. She is not your doormat; she is not your slave; she is your help-mate and you are incomplete without her.

At the end of Ephesians, chapter 5, we read:

Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:33)

Ladies and gentlemen, rather than engaging in a battle of the sexes, we need to step outside our self-centered nature and serve one another, providing whatever is lacking, truly enjoying our status as one flesh.

Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. (Colossians 3:20)

In a spiritually vital family, children are responsible for obeying their parents. The family is a living object lesson that should teach kids what the kingdom of God is all about. It pleases God when His children are obedient. It's how we demonstrate our love for the Lord.

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. (1 John 5:3)

If we truly love God, His commandments are not a burden; we want to be obedient. Children need to be taught this principle in the context of the family.

Kids are going to test limits. It happens when they are toddlers. It really happens when they get to be teenagers, so parents need to set and enforce those limits. But parents need to do so in an appropriate manner. How can kids begin to understand the love of their heavenly Father if they don't experience appropriate love from their earthly fathers?

*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.
(Colossians 3:21)*

You need to discipline your kids. You need to chasten disobedience or defiance. There is nothing wrong with spanking a strong-willed kid when he is defiantly disobedient but punishment must always be administered in love. Punishment is for correction. It must never be more severe than is warranted. You chasten your kids for correction, not revenge.

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:11)

That is the objective, but sadly, sometimes parents go too far and the discipline becomes counter-productive. Inappropriate discipline discourages children. They can become broken in spirit. They often feel deprived of their parent's love. When that happens, it leads to further rebellion. It might lead to withdrawal or it might lead to more inappropriate behavior. Kids sometimes feel like the only way they can get attention is by acting out.

We need to encourage our children. We need to make sure we provide positive reinforcement as well as punishment. Isn't that what God does for us?

Well, the spiritually vital family is one in which the father provides loving, Christ-like, servant-leadership and the mother is an integral part of that leadership. She complements her husband, providing those things he cannot provide. They are truly one flesh. They are a team. They are on the same page. He demonstrates his sacrificial love for her. She demonstrates her respect for his leadership. And the children obey because they know they are loved, disciplined and encouraged.

Do families like that actually exist? Well, no; not in the ideal. Our families, like everything else, are stained by the fall. But if we keep Christ at the center of everything we do, He will move our families in a positive direction. We can't do it without Him, that's for sure, so we need to submit to His Lordship. We need to seek His glory above all else. And with regard to our families, whatever we do ...

... in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)