

## "The Christian Family, Part 3 -- Husbands" (Colossians 3:18-21)

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**(Col 3:18–21 NIV11-GK)**

*18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*

*19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.*

*20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*

*21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.*

We're in the middle of a mini-series on biblical family roles. During week one, we spoke about the role of children. Last week, we spoke on women's roles and this week we're addressing the role of men and husbands and finally, next week we'll be addressing singles.

One of the things I want you to see is that when the Apostle Paul addresses household codes or rules, he's comprehensive. He addresses all members of the Christian home. Men, women, children, servants or slaves and masters are all addressed, as the ancient culture did practice a form of slavery. Single people aren't addressed in this passage but they are addressed in other passages throughout the bible. What we can gather from Paul's focus and the whole bible's focus is that the family is extremely important. God cares about the family and he cares how we go about doing family. How we do family is as important as how we do everything else. For example Paul says that a qualification to be a leader in the church is that that person must also be a good family man or woman. He must be able to manage his family well. I remember hearing about one church, I think it was Chuck Swindoll's, but don't quote me, that at his church when they're looking for elders, they interview not just the candidate but his family, the wife and the children, to get an idea of what kind of man he is. We must never attempt to dichotomize these two areas of life. We can't think or act as if we can behave with one standard in the home, but with another standard outside the home.

Sometimes we come across people that are incredible churchmen, meaning that within the church—its structures, its programs, its community—they come across as very admirable, respectable, and winsome people. But you hear that something's amiss in their family life. There's discontent, there's discord, there are hints of a different life or behavior. Other times you come across the person who is a great family man or family woman. You hear about their devotion to their spouses, their sacrifice for the children, and so on. But when it comes to church and God and faith there's very little to show for it.

What's harder to come-by is the person who is both. They're there. I know because they're in our church, but they're not as common as what I'm saying. This is the person who seeks to live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every realm of their lives. What you see with this person, as they shift from one role to another, wearing one hat, taking it off and putting on another, is consistency. They are godly and humble in the church, godly and humble at home, and godly and humble at work. This is what all of us should strive to be.

I think what has happened to many of us who are considered second-generation immigrants; especially having grown up in the Korean tradition is this. When we look at the way our parents did family and faith, we tend to be a bit critical of them. They worked insane hours at the store, opening before sunrise and coming home way past sunset. Usually mom and dad worked together and if a normal person today works 40-50 hours a week equaling 80-100 hours for both

mom and dad, our parents worked twice that, easily and any free time they had was spent at church attending Sunday services, which was much more than the two hours we spend on Sunday. Add to that, Wednesday night service, early prayer services, monthly small group gatherings, church meetings, leaders' meetings, church picnics, and anything else I might have forgotten. But you can see already what part of life really suffered—the family, in particular the children. For sure, some made it work, but others really struggled. So, what we did as the children who grew up in those families, is we had to find someone or something to blame. So we blamed our parents and we blamed the church. Since parents can't remain our enemies, more of the blame went to the church. I think we have to cut them some slack and just say that they did the best they could under very difficult circumstances.

Now what many second-generation families have done in response to that upbringing is that they vowed never to do family like their parents did. And they shifted the other way. They're at every dance practice, competition, hockey game, swim lesson, math tutor, school concert, birthday party, EVERYTHING, but their commitment to God and church is spotty, inconsistent, at a bare-minimum.

Now I've used this illustration before, but I think it'll help. You remember the old clocks that had a pendulum, right? The brass ball that swung left to right. In our parents' generation the pendulum was stuck at work and church and didn't swing into the family enough. For our generation, we tend to get our pendulum stuck in the family and it doesn't swing into the church as much. But think of it this way. Neither of these are a good model. A stuck pendulum means a broken clock and a stuck pendulum in our lives implies a malfunctioning life.

But what if we thought of it like this. There will be seasons when we need to focus more on family and there are seasons when we have to focus more on church and there are seasons where work will take up a greater portion of time. For singles it can be the same. What we need to do is to an evaluation of our lives. Is my pendulum stuck? If I look at the last three years of my life, am I stuck? Make it your aim today to do some assessment. Talk with a friend, talk with your spouse and commit your life, work, family, school balance to the Lord.

As I mentioned a couple weeks ago, what we see in this passage is that each group of people who are addressed have a sin issue that is specific to their gender or age or life stage. Children have an obedience issue. Wives have a submission issue. Husbands have a power-trip issue. And fathers can have a tendency to frustrate, rather than build up issue. So we all have a predisposed tendency to some vice or sin in varying degrees.

What's interesting about this chunk of verses is that wives are addressed once. Children are addressed once. Slaves are addressed once, but men are addressed three times, as husband, father, and master. As well, men are addressed first, not because they're better, but probably for emphasis. Why is that? I think it's because of the role that they play in the family as men. For example, you rarely hear of programs that emerge due to a lack of motherhood. You rarely hear a young man complaining that I am what I am because of my mother, or because of an absent mother. What you hear over and over again is that the problems in a young person's life or in a part of society is because of absent fathers. Most of the issues young people have as they get older is not because of mom, but because of dad. Why is that? It's because God has ordained it that men are to be spiritual leaders of their families. And you cannot lead if you're not present.

So let's look more closely. For the husband it's the tendency to be **harsh** with our wives. In the Greek, the word means to make *bitter*, to embitter, or make sour. In the bible it's used of water or food that has spoiled and makes someone ill. It's also used for the bitterness that can poison our spirits. For example in Acts 8:23, the Apostle Peter says, "For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

In Ephesians 4:31 Paul tells us to "get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."

Then in Hebrews 12:15 it says, "See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

So, applied to husbands how can we embitter our wives or be harsh with them? What kind of behavior would cause them to be bitter against us? When we are domineering over the family; when we don't treat our wives with respect; talking down to your wife; or ignoring her opinion or feelings; when we act out a particularly harsh leadership; being Iron-fisted; explosive tempers; or, even worse, you might become physical with your wife, raise the hand, threaten her, even leading to getting physically abusive with her. That's what I call expressions of hyper-masculinity. There is no place for it in the Christian family, or any family for that matter. Men, if you sense violent tendencies in your relationship with your woman, please get help, go to a counselor, set up an appointment with me; share it with your accountability group. Single women, if ever for a moment the man you're dating gets violent, dump him. When you're dating there is no three-strike rule. That's not the man you want to marry.

Some men can look at that description and say that since I'm nothing like what you just described, they think they're off the hook. Well, there's another type of masculinity that is the opposite of hyper-masculinity. Let's call it passive masculinity. This is the man or husband who is unwilling or unable to take the lead of his family. He always defers to his wife. He ignores his responsibilities. He'd do anything else, watch sports, play computer games, anything other than leading his wife and children. He rarely speaks up, rarely shares his opinion, rarely leads. This too can embitter a wife. She's frustrated, and even embittered that you're not leading as you should.

Here's one way to look at it. Men, if you can't say with all honesty to your son, "Treat the women in your life like dad treats mom" then you have some work to do. That's the problem.

What solution does Paul offer?

Of all the concepts and words that Paul could have used here, he uses the word **love**. He doesn't say, well you need to work at your jobs more and bring home more money and that'll make you a better family man. Yes, a man's role is to provide for his family, but that usually isn't the problem. He doesn't say, "You know what? You're stressed, you need another hobby. Pick up a hobby like cycling or golf or building computers or fishing or poker." It's great to have hobbies to take your mind off work and family from time to time, but that's not what's going to make you a better husband/father. He says, what you need is to be more loving.

Paul had the choice of several words to use here for the word love. It's too bad that in English we just have the one word for love. And we have to qualify it with adjectives and adverbs like 'really, truly, affectionately, and passionately.', but in the Greek there were three-four general words that existed for love.

One was *eros* which is where we get the word erotic. It's not a dirty word, it's just the love of passion, of sexual expression. In the English we add one word in front of love and we can express *eros*—what word is that? “Make”. Honey, let's make love. It's obvious this is not what Paul means here, because he doesn't use the word *eros*.

The other word that could have been used and can be used between a husband and wife is the Greek word *phileo*, which is where we get the name Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. It's a general word for showing love and affection. If we had a word for brotherly love today, men would be all over it and use it over and over. How we do it is by adding one word after the word love. Men, you know what that word is, right? I love you, MAN. 'I love you' would be too creepy, so we need to masculinize it by dropping our voices down an octave and tack on the word, MAN. I love you Man. But that too is not the word Paul chooses.

Some of you already know which word I'm talking about. It's called *Agape* love. What is *agape* love? Outside the bible, *agape* love was used between a man and a woman, but it was never used to describe the love in a family. Other non-biblical sources had household rules like Paul's but none of them included the word *agape*. Isn't that interesting? So *agape* can have a broader meaning, describing the love between a man and a woman, but what does Paul here intend for it to mean? Well we have to look at how Paul uses *agape* elsewhere in the letter.

(Col 2:1–2 NIV11-GK) “**1 2** My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,”

In this verse Paul tells us that it is the gospel that has made it possible for them to be so united in love (*agape*), so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ.

Now this is fascinating. What Paul is saying here is that the reason I want the church to be united in *agape* love, is order that they may better know Jesus Christ. The more deeply I am in united love with my church, the more I will know Christ. The more deeply I am in united *agape* love with my wife, the more I will know Christ.

Look at this similar verse

(1 Pet 3:7 NIV11-GK) “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”

This is amazing. Peter gives this wonderful injunction to the husbands to be considerate, to treat their wives with respect. Why? So that nothing will hinder their prayers? You think you can verbally and God-forbid physically abuse your wife and have a great prayer life, be intimately connected with God? No way Jose!

The other time *agape* appears in Colossians is in

(Col 3:12–14 NIV11-GK) “<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on **love**, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

Here too the connection between love and unity comes up again. Verse 12 and 13 are in essence the definition of *agape* love that comes up in verse 14. What is *agape* love? Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness.

Okay, let me beat the dead horse now. One more similar passage that will help us define *agape* love. And this is the best one, that'll give us the greatest clarity on what *agape* love in marriage is to look like.

(Eph 5:25–28 NIV11-GK) “<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup> In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”

Men, tough men, manly men, your injunction, your command is to love, like Christ loved, by sacrificing yourself for your wife and family. Yes, we sacrifice by working at our jobs to make money and support our families. Absolutely. The bible says, if a man doesn't work, he shouldn't eat. But it is so much more than that. You are a spiritual leader, and your job is to lead your family with the Word of God and to the Word of God. Men, that is your job. As my good pastor friend says to the men in his church, “Unless you're in the word you've got nothing good to say to your family.” Read the Word for yourself; study it; learn it. This is your act of submission to God and your act of godly leadership for your family.

When you sit to eat a meal, you lead the family in prayer. When it's time to put the kids to bed, you lead in reading the bible story and prayer. When your wife is pregnant, you lay your hand on your wife's growing belly and you pray. When it comes to the important spiritual decisions in the family, you take the lead in drawing your family to seek God's wisdom and guidance, seeking the counsel of your wife. Do you know what else a godly man does? He takes his family to church and models and teaches his family why our family is a part of an even greater family, called the church.

Men, your job is to protect your family from anything evil or wicked that would come into your family. These days, much of what is wicked comes through the internet, so it is imperative that you place restrictions and blockers on the family internet. That's your job.

Men, I'll be the first to confess. Leading a church is easy compared to leading a family. Managing million dollar portfolios, setting up complex computer systems and networks, accounting, fixing and building homes and cars, running a small business, or whichever job you may be working at is easy compared to leading a family, if you're doing it right. In my opinion this is the hardest job a man can do. The others don't even come close.

Men, listen to me. This is what it means to be masculine. Whatever idea of masculinity society has sold us, it's a lie. Masculinity is not six-pack abs and binge drinking. It's loving, humble, confident, Christ-centered leadership.

Okay, single people, we'll get you covered next week.

In my blog today I wrote that The Fall has corrupted all human sexuality and gender. What can fix it? What can make a woman a better woman, a better wife? What can make a man a better man, a better husband? It's The Gospel. All of us need the power of Jesus in us to become more like Christ in our submission and more like Christ in our loving leadership. And perhaps you feel the heavy weight of failed masculinity, or not measuring up to being the husband, father, you were called to be. Do not fear, the gospel can take care of that too.

Humbly come to the perfect Father in God and the perfect man in Christ, and receive from them grace upon grace, grace upon grace, for forgiveness, and for the renewed ability to be a godly man.