

The Church in the Valley: The Kingdom of God and Family Life
a message based on
Colossians 3:15-21

Followers of Jesus:

One of the biggest influences in Greek culture came from a group who called themselves "Stoic philosophers." C.H. Dodd has done a study of one of their thinkers, Hierocles, who wrote about family life. One of the things Stoics believe about life is that we must live in accordance with nature (F.F. Bruce). So when Paul turns to life in the family, he's writing about something his audience would have been familiar with before they had become followers of the Jesus way. There is one difference to Paul's teaching, compared to the Stoics. "The Lord Jesus," writes Murray J. Harris, "Is the yardstick for determining what is fitting (v. 18) or pleasing (v. 20)."

He has been detailing for us how we should relate to us as church family, the body of Christ here on earth, now he takes a step away from the church and moves into our homes and sits there for a while. How should wives relate to their husbands? How should husbands relate to their wives? How should children relate to their parents? How should parents (in this case, particularly fathers) relate to children? These are important questions. Why?

When God created the world it was his decision to populate it through the coming together of a man and a woman. This coming together produced children and families. Family is God's idea, and it is God's way of building up a society, God's way of populating the earth. It is the basic building blocks of society. The stronger the family is, the better society is.

Imagine, with me, a world where people go around doing whatever they want. It's a world where every person, all the time, gets what they want. Every person gets their own way. It's a world where everyone, all the time, is right, never makes a mistake, always knows the right course of action. Is that the world we live in? Does it sound familiar to you at all? I think we would all agree, "That kind of world is impossible! It would never work."

That's the kind of society there would be if there was never anyone who did what the verses we've just read urge us toward. Imagine a world where people were falling all over themselves saying to everyone else around them, "No, you go first! I'll wait. I know within my heart that life is not all about me; it's about the other." Can life

be that way, though? Is it possible?

It is possible when we realize that we can't do it alone. It is possible when we believe that the most important thing for each one of us is to stay connected to Christ. It is possible when we believe that our resource for living is Christ living inside of us. It is possible when we learn more and more every day that Christ is our life, and the secret to living with people who are closest to us, sometimes crowding us out, sometimes very much in our way; the secret is by learning the rhythm of death and resurrection with Christ, and stripping off of the uglies, and clothing ourselves with beauties.

The word, I suspect that has become rather controversial and misunderstood in our day, is the word *submit*. The same notion of submission is found in the word *obey*, for children. Paul's letter to the Ephesians has a fuller explanation for family life, and in that letter we read about submission as well. Here's how the section begins there, before it says about the same as here.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands... (Eph 5:21-22).

Here's what I want us all to hear. Are we listening? Jesus lived a life of submission. Want some evidence? In the garden, in agony, in prayer.

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

Jesus lived a perfect life on earth. He made no mistakes, ever. He never lied, didn't cheat, was never dishonest. He could never say, "I was wrong, and I'm sorry." He could say, however, "I don't want to do this because it'll be too hard, but if you want me to do it, 'your will be done.'"

Not one of us is perfect. Not one of us gets it right every time. Not one of us can say we have never sinned. Yet I know that many of us can say that we know somebody who always has to be right, who will never say, "I'm sorry," and must always get their own way. Difficult people, aren't they? People who won't submit. People who refuse to say, "Your will be done."

I might be wrong, but I think it is true that women especially have a hard time submitting and saying, "No, you first." That is why it says that wives need to submit to their husbands. If you as a woman disagree then the only thing I can say is, "Take up with God and bring it to his attention."

Please don't get me wrong. This idea of submission has been abused by the church, making it seem as though women were inferior and had to be kept under the thumb of the husband. Women have been scarred, and scared by their husbands in times past, on the basis of this verse. In the interest of trying to obey God, people have been quite seriously hurt, and sin has been committed instead of the obedience called for.

We were have a discussion about this over supper in celebration of an anniversary. Someone said that men get a lot of respect at work for the work they do. They get raises, praises, and promotions because of their hard work. And then, when they come home their wives don't see it. The wives don't respect the husband, and instead try to manipulate, try to insinuate, try to get their husbands to love them by doing what they need done. Respect is what a man needs, though. One of the ways respect can be shown is through submission.

I know I'm right in saying that men (husbands) aren't all that good at loving. We may be good at, and highly interested in romancing our women (when it suits our fancy), but loving them is a lot harder to do. Again the Ephesians passage says more than here.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... (Eph 5:25).

Interesting. Wives are not told to love their husbands. But husbands are told to love their wives. Why? Because naturally we husbands have no idea how to love our wives. I am also sure that if husbands take this verse seriously, they would discover that it is a lot harder to love their wives in this way than it is for their wives to submit.

Do we want our wives to respect us, husbands? Love them in the same way Jesus loved the church! Love them with no conditions attached. Don't have the attitude, "I'll love her if she would just measure up to my standards." Don't have the attitude, "I'll love her when she begins meeting my needs." Love your wives even when you don't get your own way, love them despite their ugly moments, pursue every day finding ways to meet their need for love.

The home is the building block for the creation of society. It is the place where kingdom values are practiced, principles of the Lord Jesus himself. How will the kingdom come into our homes. When we put into practice this incredible act of love and submission.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have

against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you (Col 3:13).

The desire to get even is strong in the old way of being human. In Christ Jesus, though, God is creating us to be a new way to be human. Forgiveness practiced in the home is the key to a strong family.

I know the arguments against forgiveness. "I don't feel like it." "It feels better to hate." "What if they're not sorry; then I don't need to forgive, do I?" "If I forgive, then how will the other ever learn that they shouldn't be that way, and that I don't approve?" Not forgiving won't resolve any issues we may have against another.

Parents, do you know that your children are holy? That's what the Bible says! It's how God views them! Therefore, it is our job as parents to instruct our children in the ways of the Lord. It begins by teaching them about their own hearts, how in each of us there is this capacity to be mean to others; and that's why we need a Savior, why we all need Jesus. One of the first things we need to teach our children is how to forgive, how to really forgive from the heart. But before that, we need to teach them that in order for them to succeed in this life, they must commit themselves to the Lord Jesus, accept him as Savior, and receive him into their hearts.

One note: parents, children are not there to meet our (unmet) needs. Children are God's gift to us, and it is our task to teach them the way of Jesus. This is not an easy task. But remember, Christ is in us. Remember how Christ is described in Colossians.

Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3).

If there is anything that parents need, it is wisdom, the practical day-to-day aspects of caring for children.

One final word. The last verse refers to "Fathers," and though the plural of fathers can sometimes simply mean, "parents," here I think it means, "Parents, especially fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged." What's this about? A verse from First Thessalonians gives some clarity.

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:11f).

It's part of how God has put men together. We fathers want our children to do well, right? So God has built in us this urgency to push our children to do better and to be better. Sometimes, though, we push too hard, and instead of encouraging them, we discourage them; we take the wind right out of their sails.