



THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD
LIVING CHRISTIANLY IN THE HOME

Colossians 3:18-21

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

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

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

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

Introduction – The Community of the Family

Christ is the key to community; that's been our theme over the last couple of weeks. We've identified Colossians 3:11 as the key verse that articulates in a beautifully succinct way that Christ is the key to community. Look there in verse 3:11. Christ is the key to community, that is when Christ *is* all and when Christ is *in* all. Over the last couple of weeks that's what we've been doing, when fleshing out in one particular community—the community of the church—what it looks like for Christ to *be* all and for Christ *be in* all in the life of the community of the church.

This morning we turn our attention to another community where Christ wants to *be* all and where Christ ought to be *in* all. And the other community is the community of the family. A family in fact is the first community. Before there was a church, there was a garden; before there were elders, pastors and deacons, offerings and communion, before there was any of that, there was Adam and there was Eve and their children. There was family. Family is the first community. Family is the basis of all of the community. A family is the most basic of all communities. So what we are going to look at this morning is what it means for Christ to be all and to be in all in the life of this community, the family. What does it look like for a wife to have Christ as all in the life of the home? What does it look like for a husband to have Christ as all in the context of the home? What does it look like for children who are seeking to make Christ preeminent and supreme over all things? What does it look like in the context of the home to make Jesus Christ all? What does it look like for parents to parent with Christ as all, not self as all?

That's what we are doing to this morning. We're going to look at Paul's straightforward and simple advice in this passage. This is sort of the meat and potatoes of Colossians, if you will. This is the ABCs of Christian living as it relates to the life of the family. You can find out much more fancy, interesting, perhaps stimulating stuff from Dr. Phil. It will take him a lot longer to explain his advice on the family and on marriage than you will find here in the Apostle Paul. But let me suggest that this is more poignant, more profound, and more life transforming. What we have here is really just a sketch of an outline of what it means to live christianly in the home.

And living christianly in the home looks different for different members in the home. For a wife it looks one way, for a husband it looks another way; for children it looks one way and for a parent it looks a different way. That's what Paul is describing here. In fact there are six

different roles he identifies in the ancient household. Of course, Paul is writing in the first century—to ancient households and so there are six roles that he identifies here: wives in verse 18, husbands in verse 19, children in verse 20, fathers or parents in verse 21, and then slaves in verse 22 and masters in chapter 4:1. These six roles which comprise the three key relationships in the ancient home: the marital relationship between husbands and wives; the parental relationship between parents and children, and then the economic relationship within the context of the ancient world—the economical relationship of slaves and masters. The household in the ancient world included slaves within it.

This morning we are just going to deal with the first two relationships, or the first four roles: wives and husbands, children and parents. We're going to defer handling the issue of slaves and masters, and what relevance or application does that part of the word of God have for us in our day and age in the 21st century.

A Marriage Relationship with Christ as All

We are going to be asking ourselves: What does it look like for a marriage to have Christ as all? What does it look like for parental relationship to have Christ as all? We are going to start as Paul does with the marital relationship.

Marriage as an institution has fallen on hard times in our western culture and society. There is a growing confusion about the institution of marriage on a lot of fronts and for a lot of different reasons. Along with the growing confusion is also a growing disillusionment with marriage and indeed in some places, a growing skepticism about marriage; skeptical, even sometimes cynical attitudes about the institution of marriage. You may have heard about the 7-yr-old girl, who just saw the movie Cinderella; she wanted to test out the knowledge of her neighbor lady of the story of Cinderella and the prince. She asked her neighbor about it. The neighbor lady says, "Well, I know how the story ends." And the 7-yr-old girl says, "How does it end?" and the dear old neighbor lady says, "Cinderella and the prince live happily ever after." "That's not how it ends," the 7-yr-old girl says. "They get married! That's how it ends!" That's a charming little illustration of a growing skepticism and cynicism about the institution of marriage.

The Role of Wives and Submission

Paul's first word as it relates to the institution of marriage is to wives. Here's what he says to wives: Wives, to live christianly in the home means to gracefully submit to your husbands. That's the word to wives. To live christianly in the home, in the context of the marriage means to gracefully submit to your husbands. Also in verse 18, "Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord." Now "submit" is one of those words that is an "Ouch" word in the Bible these days. Let's be just be blunt, let's be frank; it's a kind of six letter word in the Bible. It's got lots of negative connotations in our culture and society and even within the church. It's understandable because of the kind of confusion and misunderstandings that are often gone along with, and indeed interpreted at times concerning the word "submission", and the meaning of submission within the church and within the broader culture. A helpful way to begin thinking about what submission means is to talk about what it does *not* mean biblically speaking. The bible calls wives to submit to their husbands, which is indeed the consistent teaching of the NT—you see it in 1 Peter, Ephesians 5 and Colossian 3. It's a pretty consistent teaching in the New Testament.

What submission to a husband does *not* mean or imply is any inferiority. I would just say that up front in case it wasn't obvious or clear—it does not imply inferiority. Indeed the whole notion of submission implies and assumes equality! It's just a way of saying that of these two co-equal partners one of them is called upon to voluntarily to release and come under the leadership of the other co-equal partner. So the wife's submission to the husband is not because of any sense of inferiority.

It also does not mean obedience. You need to see that in the contrast between what wives are called to and what children are called to. Submission does not mean obedience. I say to me son Ezra, as a child, "Ezra, brush your teeth and go to bed." I would never dream in my wildest imagination of saying that to my wife! Submission is not about taking orders, submitting to the sergeant, the husband in the home. It does not mean obedience, inferiority or more importantly, it does not mean passivity! Wives, young women, if you have the gift of leadership and you're entrepreneurial, do not think you have to submit and become passive and set all my gifts and strengths aside. Submission does not mean passivity, setting aside and shelving who you are. Some of you indeed have the gift of leadership.

What then does biblical submission mean? The best definition I've found is in John Piper's "Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood." He says, "Biblical submission, for the wife, is the divine calling to honor and affirm her husband's leadership, and help carry it through according to her gifts." There are 3 parts to that. Biblical submission is, first of all, a divine calling; not the calling of a husband, a pastor but the calling of God; it is a divine calling. The issue of submission, women, is ultimately not an issue between you and your husband but between you and the Lord—a divine calling place upon the role or the office of the wife. It's a divine calling to honor and affirm the husband's leadership; to support, to encourage, to embrace, to get behind, and to affirm the husband's leadership. Thirdly, it entails helping carry it through according to the wife's gifts. That's what submission is—a divine calling to honor and affirm her husband's leadership. Your role as a wife is to come under and submit to that by marshalling everything you've got to make his leadership as success for the good of the family, and for the good of the gospel as it advances through your family. It's about marshalling all your resources to help him attain and fulfill his calling in his responsibility.

That's the biblical way to think about submission; that's the consistent teaching of the Bible as it relates to men and women and their wives. Its *graceful* submission in at least two ways; not begrudging because you recognize as a wife, verse 18, this is what God has ordained and designed it. So it is fitting in the Lord, as Paul says, that the wife should embrace this calling, and do it gracefully.

Grace and Submission

The second way is that it needs to be filled with grace. Wives, in order to submit well and in a way that is fitting to the Lord, you need grace. I don't say this patronizingly but as a husband who has a wife who seeks to submit to my leadership even when I'm being an idiot! Yet that does not change the calling on her life. She is still called to submit to my leadership even when it's not in the direction or the way in which she would prefer. Thus, women, if you are going to do this gracefully, it's got to be grace filled. You've got to be eagerly seeking the grace of God on a daily basis, saying, "God help me to support, encourage, honor and affirm my husband, even when he is frustrating, fickle, passive, even when I would outshine him if I was the leader." That's what verse 18 is calling for. Wives, to live christianly mean to gracefully submit to your husband. So let me ask how are you doing with this?

Loving Leadership

The second aspect, the counter point is to husband in verse 19: “Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.” Oftentimes, and certainly in the history of society and church, you might hear the call to women to submit, the husbands might say “We’ve got the better end of the bargain, didn’t we? They got to submit. We get to lead, be in charge; I’m the man!” Not exactly! Yes, the Bible consistently teaches that the husband is the leader of the home but, the leadership you are to exhibit is the leadership Jesus Christ himself embodies. Thus, a husband, to live Christianly in the home is to *lovingly* lead your wife. And the pattern for loving leadership is the pattern Jesus Christ left us. Paul in the parallel passage in Ephesians 5 cuts right to the quick where he really lowers the boom in verse 25: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...” That’s the kind of loving leadership—not couch-potato, emasculated masculinity that goes on all over the place, but loving leadership—exemplified in Jesus Christ. It consists of two things: His loving leadership is incarnational and sacrificial. How is it that he gave himself up for the church but by incarnating himself, but taking on human flesh? Husbands, if you were to love your wife in an incarnational way, think of all the horizons that may open up for you. How do I get inside my wife’s skin? To take on her flesh so that I feel her aspirations, desires; I understand her disappointments; I know her dreams, her likes and dislikes, to know everything about her—to incarnate myself in my wife’s skin to know everything about her. I pray with her, for her, talk, know her inside and out—as it were, incarnated myself. That is loving leadership.

Sacrificial Leadership

The other piece is sacrificial; that is, you’ve got to give yourself up for your wife! Yes, a wife must submit to her husband as her calling. Guys, ours is crucifixion! Crucifixion! We must give ourselves up for our wives! I remember, some times regretfully, getting Ephesians 5:25 in my head—a problem with memorizing the Bible because you find yourself interacting in the context and situation to which a passage of Scripture you have memorized pertains, and the Holy Spirit takes up that verse like a megaphone. “Wilson, what do you think you are doing? Husbands love your wives and give yourself for her!” You’ve got no argument until you’re dead. You start to get jockeying with your spouse—not until you’re dead are you done with your giving of yourself to your spouse. Men, husbands, that’s what we are called to do—loving leadership that’s incarnational and sacrificial. Thus, when that’s going on, there is no way the second part of verse 19 is ever going to happen—love your wives and do not be harsh with them. When you are being incarnational and sacrificial in your loving leadership, there is no way harshness will come out.

I had a 7th grade football coach who was harsh. He had us laid back in the dust and the dirt, fall football practice, one of these deals where you’ve got to lift your leg up six inches and hold them there for a minute. The cleats by the way weighed more than my legs. If anyone touches the cleats down, he’d blow the whistle for another minute! You had to have a consistent minute. O, the groans that would come out! That was harsh! Our loving leadership is not to be harsh but be sacrificial and incarnational. When you have graceful submission together with loving leadership, it is the most elegant dance, the most beautiful dance—Christ is in it, he is everything—that is the vision of husbands and wives in the Bible, the vision of the marital relationship. That is the first part of this passage we are looking at.

Parental Relationship – Obedience to parents

The second part is the transition of verses 20-21 to the parental relationship. The first word is to children: “Children, obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord.” What’s its saying is, for children to live christianly in the home, means for them to be willingly obeying their parents. What does that word “obey” mean? In the Greek translated into English, it means “obey”, that is, “comply with directives.” There are directives given, and compliance is the expectation. So, children, that is the expectation: to live a Christian life is to be compliant with directives. Biblically speaking, we cannot separate the act of compliance from the attitude or the disposition of the heart if it’s to be true obedience. There’s got to be willingness as well, a willing obedience.

And what is the scope? The scope of obedience is “in everything;” it’s comprehensive. Children, young people, in so far as you are dependent on you parents in everything, so too, you owe them obedience in everything. In so far as you become independent of your parents’ provision and you are providing for yourself, so too, you are no longer responsible, biblically speaking, to obey them. To honor your parents always is the bigger category; that never stops. From obedience we transition to full fledge honor as we go from dependence to independence from childhood to mature adulthood. So that is the critical thing; we obey in everything in so far as we depend upon them for everything.

Now many of the parents who have adolescent children know that that is an interesting transition. I am not here to advise you on that transition on when obedience stops and honor starts, or how you go from one to the other. But just know the principle—children obey your parents in everything because it pleases the Lord. Just as wives submitting to their husbands is ultimately about their submission to the Lord, so too, children, your obedience to your parents is ultimately about your relationship with Jesus Christ. That is what pleases the Lord.

Fathers, do not embitter your children

The counterpart to that is in verse 21: “Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.” Here is the fourth word, the role of parents. The word Paul has for us here is, for parents to live Christianly in the home means patiently encouraging their children. The NIV here translates the word as “Fathers;” it could be translated as “Parents.” Given what Paul says in verse 21, he does have his eye on fathers; “Fathers, do not embitter your children,” that is, do not exasperate them; don’t fatigue them with tediousness; don’t embitter them over the long haul or they will become discouraged. Some of you may have grown up in a home like this with a father who just exasperated you. This is the mode of operation in many homes by many fathers, and parents to a certain extent, but particularly fathers. I think this is a particular vice or challenge for men, for fathers who find their children provoking, and thus they respond in a way that is exasperating, over the top and overbearing. And there are a variety of ways to do this, aren’t there. How do we do this? Being overly protective, using harsh belittling words, being emotionally distant, being physically absent, too high of expectations that are communicated and laid atop of children. Do you know that does? It embitters a child that just becomes over time discouraged.

You might not think it but I spent a lot of time riding horses growing up. Do I look like the kind of person that rode horses growing up. My dad is a real renaissance outdoors man and he took us on all sorts of horseback trips growing up. So I learned a few things about horses. You can train a horse in one of two ways: by gently and steadily, consistently encouraging and

correcting to obtain the behavior you desire; or, you can whack the horse and break it to get the behavior you desire. The first method seems like the slower and weaker approach but what that method does is preserve the strength of the horse. Whereas the second method, the whacking method, seems more efficient and strong at the front end but it breaks the horse and his spirit. What Paul in the word of God is calling us to as parents, particularly as fathers, is to take the first tack in training our children, raising them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, not to be harsh, to embitter so as to discourage and break the will of our children but be patiently encouraging them along the way.

Conclusion – Practicing Forgiveness in living Christianly

Well, these four verses sketch for us what it means to live Christianly in the context of community. The community here in mind is the community of the family—the first community, you might say. As we as a church think about being a City on a Hill, it's a good reminder to us that it begins first of all at home, by living Christianly in the home where we are most truly ourselves in the context of the home. Yet, even as I am saying that, to talk about family from a biblical and Christian perspective raises a lot of emotions. Perhaps you didn't come from the kind of family you wished for; abusive situations, strange relationships, or perhaps you are not embodying the kind of family you had hoped for. You feel regret about how you are as a husband you have loved or not loved your wife, or the wife toward the husband; or as a children you think about how you were disrespectful and recalcitrant and resisted the leadership and the training of your parents; and parents, about how you were overbearing at times. This is a critical and a sensitive topic. So the final principle to leave with you is this: to live christianly in the home means regularly forgiving one another. That is the fifth and final principle. Just as wives are to gracefully submit, and husbands lovingly lead, and children willingly obey, and parents patiently encourage, so too, everyone in the family must run to the cross and there receive forgiveness for having fallen short of all that God calls us to be, and requires of us, and thereby learn to extend forgiveness to those in our families who disappoint us on a regular bases. And so, fifthly and finally, living Christianly in the home is all about regularly and daily extending forgiveness to one another.

Amen.