

New Now

6. *Family life make-over*

February 12, 2023

The families we grow up in influence us in many ways. They influence our physical appearance. Sometimes you can tell people are related just by looking at them. Other times, family members don't look alike, but they share similar attitudes and customs.

We live the early years of our lives in our immediate family, and they shape us in powerful ways. Our families give us everything from our genetic DNA to our language to our values. Our families shape our mental health, the way we see the world, other people, and the future. And the family is the primary training ground for spiritual development.

God cares a lot about families. In the Bible, we see that He works through families, not just individuals. He called Abraham and said he'd bless his family descendants. The Messiah would come from the family and lineage of David. In Acts 16:31, Paul tells the jailer in Philippi, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.*" He told Timothy to remember the example of his family.

Families are central to the purposes of God. **God intends your family to be a Kingdom environment that allows everyone to become who they are in Christ.** The Holy Spirit can help your family to operate on heaven's wavelength so that the members of your family relate to each other like Jesus taught: to seek the Kingdom of God together; everyone's faith grows and matures; and each one is prepared to fulfill their purpose in Christ.

In the letter to the Colossians, Paul instructs believers on how to live out their new life in Jesus in their families. New believers create new families. The Colossians couldn't just model their families after the one they grew up in because they didn't grow up in Christ-centered families; they grew up in a Roman-style family, which operated differently. Maybe you didn't grow up in a Christian family, either. Let God create a new vision for family within you today.

If you grew up in a Christian family, you are blessed. However, every family has some degree of dysfunction, because we're all in the process of becoming like Jesus and haven't arrived yet. Let's let the Holy Spirit speak to us today.

Back in the Roman era, a household typically consisted of a father, mother, kids, and slaves. In Colossians 3, Paul briefly addresses each group, teaching them how they are to live for Jesus where they find themselves. This Colossians 3 passage about the family is a shorter version of a parallel passage in Ephesians 5. On the surface these

verses are straightforward, but we'll see they also present some interpretation challenges.

Paul starts by speaking about **Kingdom marriage**. In **Col. 3:18-19**, he gives two short sentences of marriage counseling. **Col. 3:18-19** *Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.* And... we're into the deep end of the pool. Wives, submit, husbands, love. The Colossian wives would not have been surprised to be called to submit to their husbands. They expected to hear that because it was the law at the time. Husbands, though, would be startled to hear that they were to love their wives. That wasn't assumed to be important in that culture.

Today, we all assume a husband should love his wife, but the idea of submitting to a husband often produces a much different response. We're into a question of interpretation. Does the call to submit apply just to wives in the culture of that day or does it apply today as well? There are reasonable arguments for each view. We don't have time to delve deeply into that question today. Whichever way you answer that question, the key to Kingdom living is to hold the call to submit and the call to love together.

A well-known pastor told about attending a wedding reception years ago and a young woman from the wedding party challenged him saying, "I heard a preacher say that the man had to be the head of the home because a two-headed home is like a two-headed monster. Is that what you believe? That the man is the head?"

The pastor replied, "Before I answer your question, imagine you're married to a man who genuinely believes you are the most fantastic person on the planet. He's crazy about you. You have no doubt that your happiness is his top priority He listens when you talk. He honors you in public. To use an old-fashioned term, he "cherishes" you. He's not afraid to make a decision. He values your opinions. He leads, but he listens. He's responsible. He's not argumentative. You have no doubt that he would give his life for you if the need arose. You never worry about him being unfaithful. In fact, to quote an old Flamingos song, "he only has eyes for you." When he finished, the pastor paused and asked, "Would you have trouble following a man like that?" The woman responded, "Well, heck no! I want to meet that guy."

It's not hard to submit to someone who genuinely loves you and has your best interest in mind. Why? Because there's no *fear*. You don't have to have your guard up that the other person is going to harm, shame, or devalue you. That's God's intent in marriage: oneness! And anyone who has your best interest in mind has in effect *submitted to you*. That person won't just ignore you and act selfishly; he has chosen to think of you, not just himself. ¹

¹ from Andy Stanley, *The New Rules of Love, Sex, and Dating* (Zondervan, 2015), pp. 41-42

That's why the parallel passage in Ephesians 5 starts out: **Ephesians 5:21** *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.* We are to submit to each other: the wife to the husband, the husband to the wife out of sacrificial love.

So guys, we won't fulfill God's highest purpose by saying, "The Bible says God wants my wife to follow what I say." This scripture says that what God wants is for you to love and to cherish your wife like Christ loves the Church. That means that you be ready to die for her, and then show that by dying daily in little ways to serve and love her.

This verse is not a license for male control or domination. Too many women have experienced domestic abuse, which is never to be tolerated, and it is even worse when done in God's name. Submission is not an excuse for devaluing women, either.

God is not concerned with who does which household chores. Jesus told us God's original intent for marriage: **Matthew 19:4-6** *"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."* God's intent for marriage is oneness. *That* reflects the Kingdom.

Ephesians 5:31 repeats: *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."* God's intent for a marriage that unleashes us into our identity in Christ: the two become one. So practically, how do we live out the Kingdom of God in our marriage? **Ephesians 5** continues, *³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

To help your spouse thrive: Wives, respect your husband. Your husband wants to feel your love, but he needs your respect. If you want a strong, rich marriage, makes sure your husband senses your respect. Some joke about the male ego, which is often a distortion of a legitimate need for respect. Don't wait for perfection in order to show respect. You are married to an imperfect man, as he is married to an imperfect woman. Focus on his strengths more than his faults. Make it a point that you will speak well about him to others. Don't speak to him in a demeaning tone or talking down to him. Speak well about him to your children.

Husbands, cherish your wives. Your wife wants you to respect her, but she needs to feel your love. This doesn't come from an unusual, large dramatic gesture, but rather in small acts of kindness that show you were thinking about her. Tell her why you love her. Learn to speak her love language through acts of service, words of affirmation, physical touch, receiving gifts, quality time. Make her laugh. She needs to feel that she is central to your life, and not an after thought.

Love grows when it is intentionally watered, not from a lightning bolt out of the blue. All spouses need both love and respect, but generally the accent is on respect for husbands and on love for wives.

Kingdom Parenting is described in ***Colossians 3:20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*** Obeying parents is one of the top ten commandments of God. ***Ephesians 6:2*** says, “**Honor your father and mother,**” which is the **first commandment with a promise.**

Children should, first, obey their parents because **parents can protect you.** Last year Jacob Kingsley was attending a Cincinnati Reds baseball game with his wife and infant son. He was feeding his baby when a foul ball was hit into the stands and came right at him and his son. Amazingly, the Dad calmly caught the ball with his right hand while continuing to feed the baby with his left hand. What a good metaphor for what a dad or mom do! That baby had no idea a baseball could fly in and hit it. But Dad did. Your parents have a perspective and experience that you don't yet have, so they can protect you from what can harm you. You may not always realize that's what they are doing, but that is their instinct.

Secondly, children should obey their parents because **parents can guide you.** Do you remember guidance your father or mother gave you? As a teenager, I remember my dad telling me that owning a car would give me some freedom, but that the financial responsibilities that came with it would also tie me down. That was true.

I remember him pointing me to a different college than the one I was planning on attending. That turned out great. If I had ignored him, I would have had a harder time than necessary.

Third, children should obey their parents because **parents will train their children to obey God.** That will help children thrive spiritually. We are not saved by obeying God's law, but we fulfill our destiny in Christ by obeying what he says.

When Joshua was stepping up to the daunting task of taking over for Moses and leading the Jews into the Promised Land, he knew he was going to face battles. He had scouted the land already and had seen the people who lived there. God spoke and gave Joshua practical steps to prepare for his mission: ***Joshua 1:8** **Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.***

God told Joshua that obedience would set him up for success. And we first learn to obey by obeying our parents. That sets us up for success. To follow Jesus means to learn to obey him, too. ***Matt. 28:19-20** **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.***

There it is again, obeying what God said, and the result is: *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*"

Then Paul addresses the fathers: **Colossians 3:21** *Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.* Roman law gave fathers complete power over his son(s). The father could put a son in chains, keep him at work in the fields, or even put him to death, even if the son was an adult. This verse says, "Don't be that dad!" To thrive, children need boundaries, and it is up to the parents to enforce those boundaries. That might make you unpopular with your kid for a while, but they need you to be their parent, not their friend. They can have lots of friends, but you are the only parents they have; play the role! As parents, it's your role to correct, but not to crush.

Slaves and serving Jesus. Many households had slaves. It is interesting that Paul devotes almost twice as many words to slaves as he did to wives, husbands and children put together!

²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵ Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.

Telling slaves to obey their masters doesn't mean that slavery is God's will, or that the Bible teaches slavery. Paul's purpose in writing this letter was not to reform the societal structure of the Roman empire. He had no power to do that. He could not tell slaves to rise up in rebellion; that would have resulted in mass death. Paul here was giving specific counsel to believers on how to honor Jesus in whatever circumstances they found themselves, and many found themselves slaves.

In the book of Philemon, Paul writes to a slave owner telling him to treat his runaway slave with dignity **Philemon 15-16** *Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— ¹⁶ no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother.* Historically, it was Christians who worked tirelessly to end slavery both in the US and England.

What is the takeaway for us in these verses? We can't equate slavery with our jobs, but we can take to heart **verse 23:** *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,* Whatever we do, do it for Jesus. Do your accounting like it was Jesus' business as a client. Serve as if Jesus were your customer. Teach as if Jesus were your principal.

Finally, **Masters be fair.** **Colossians 4:1** *Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.*

Again, Paul's purpose in writing this letter was to teach Christians how to live in light of their new life. He closes by reminding any that owned slaves not to take advantage of their power, but to remember that they answer to God themselves. If you have employees, it is good to remember that God sees how you treat them, so provide what is right and fair.

No matter whether you feel like your family is healthy or unhealthy, dysfunctional or great, know that God wants to be at work in it, and in you. By asking God to work through your family you can see him do remarkable things. Pray for that now.