

Section 9: Down to Earth 1: Family Relationships. Living it out in the Home.

Colossians 3:18-21

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

3:19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

3:20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

3:21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

We now come to a series of practical applications of these truths in real situations.

We start with family relationships.

Many weddings take place in this church, and at nearly all of them I read the passage from Ephesians that expresses something of the same ideas which are expressed here in Colossians. There are times when there is an audible gasp when people hear what it says! This is not one of the most popular ideas or teachings in the New Testament, especially in an age of emancipation, and post women's-liberation.

So, what do we do? Do we ignore or disregard this message because it isn't popular?

I don't think we can.

It is practical, relevant teaching which we will look at under four headings:

1. Submission:
2. Sacrificial love:
3. Obedience:
4. Respect

Let's look at each of these in turn. First,

1. Submission.

In our society today, this is a word that carries all kinds of connotations, most of them negative. So, let's look at the principles which underlie it and all that is associated with it in order to understand what is meant here. Let's look at what submission is.

It does not mean 'of a lesser degree' 'of little worth' or 'of minimum value', or 'never expressing an opinion'; and certainly not some sort of slavery. Rather, it is the voluntary submission to another; it is the

loyalty and the support for a husband who is the recognised head of the household. It includes the willingness to give way to your husband's decision even when you don't agree. But it is not always one-sided. In all of this the husband is to take account of his wife's wise counsel. It also has clear boundaries. It is submission "to your husband". There is a very specific remit here: it is not to every man, but to the one to whom a commitment has been made in marriage.

Why is it desirable? On what basis is it appropriate? These verses state clearly that it is "fitting in the Lord". It is about the order in relationships that God sets and provides for individuals and for society. In that, we have the example of the Church as the Bride of Christ being subject to His authority.

Looking at it from another perspective, what does it mean not to be submissive? I again often say at weddings that women have a propensity to seek the best for their husbands and so go on at length to try to mould them! It is often the case that men act like idiots and deserve such corrective guidance and moulding. But to be told so publicly in a humiliating way or to be reminded with the superiority stance implied in that great phrase - I told you so! - that we all love to use so often, is not the best expression of submission. Rather, it is the notion that there is a mutual trust and a real partnership. Of course, there are those whose marriage is more like a formal business partnership, where there are separate bank accounts and a demarcation of all property; and even specification of the time when one will have their night out and the other will have theirs. That is not what is envisaged here.

The submission talked about here is a submissive working together in love, where grace plays a large part. It is a positive feature. And that requires:

2. **Sacrificial love.**

Love is thinking and acting beneficially towards someone else and to do it sacrificially means regardless of its personal implications. This applies particularly to husbands within marriage, (and to all men as a general principle). For, the responsibility and role of the husband in a family is to provide sacrificial love for his wife and his family.

To do that, the husband needs to honour, respect, cherish and value his wife. For example, it means not being harsh with them. It means remembering that wives have specific needs and aspirations, and in that regard men have restrictions and obligations that they did not

have as single men. They cannot behave in a regardless way. For example, in certain situations men often simply seek the practical solution; they want the answer without going through the process. But, for women, the process is all important: they want to weigh up the pros and cons and often 'think aloud'. In such instances, as men, we shouldn't start tapping our feet and saying "*Do we have to go over all this again?*"

To help us achieve this we are to look at the example of Christ and His sacrificial love for the church.

Let's look at other examples. What does the failure to love sacrificially entail? It can include:

- Not taking the necessary time to communicate fully.
- Insensitivity to the emotional nature of the wife and the different way of responding that they have to problems and situations; and showing a willingness to adjust our habits.
- Taking her for granted and failing to value her as a gift from God.
- Not looking for ways to show your love in a practical way.
- Neglecting to nurture a common prayer life.
- Being aware of the danger of finding an emotional connection with someone else other than your wife.

On the practical side, Paul's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 contains valuable advice and encouragement.

And, what about children?

3. Obedience: Children are to be obedient

In a society where children have come to dominate and to be excessively, sometimes misguidedly, indulged with material possessions, there is a clear instruction: children are to do as they are told.

Parents are responsible and are to act in love. Consequently it is the duty - and privilege - of children to respond positively to that guidance and discipline. And the reason for that is again: because 'it pleases the Lord'. This is God's pattern.

In the New Testament we have the example of Christ obeying His Heavenly Father, not only as a child but also in terms of the Divine purpose as set out in Philippians 2.

How does failure to obey manifest itself in children's behaviour? Here are a few examples:

- Body language and disrespect; answering back or arguing

- Being "sleekit" and hoping not to get caught.
- Looking for loopholes to get out of what they are supposed to do.
- Partial or total disobedience. (half tidy up their room.)
- Delayed obedience (*I'll do it later.*)
- Failure to be responsible.

Within a loving family, children need to be disciplined by those very parents who, in baptism, promised to bring up their children *'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord'*. But, there is parental responsibility to be shown here also.

4. **Respect:**

Fathers, here's another responsibility: don't embitter or exasperate your children. Treat them with respect.

Why? So that they don't become discouraged. The goal of the parents is to encourage and help children mature.

Again in the New Testament we have the example of Christ patiently nurturing the disciples. His was a role of correcting, rebuking and being frustrated and yet it was all done in a firm but positive way, showing respect and concern, encouraging and commending where appropriate. He was always moving towards the fulfilment of a high purpose, as demonstrated in His prayer in John 17.

For us, it is worth taking a moment to think: *How do we exasperate our children?* It can be inadvertent or deliberate but it invariably includes such things as:

- Making promises we don't keep
- Not giving them credit for the good things they do and for the good people they are
- Nagging them to death
- Seeking to 'micromanage' them - often for selfish purposes.
- Having unrealistic expectations, sometimes as an attempt to compensate for our concerns and hang-ups.
- Being guilty of 'playing favourites' with our children
- Being inconsistent in applying rules
- Over-punishing and not showing tenderness afterwards
- Ignoring them or over-indulging them.

The family is God's unit and a demonstration to the world of a "more excellent way".

And, if relationships are important at home in the family, they are equally important elsewhere. We turn to that now.