

What A Spirit-Controlled Home Looks Like Colossians 3:18-21

What does your family look like? I am not asking us to think about what our family looks like in terms of what a photograph will reveal. All too often we evaluate how a family is doing by their external appearances. What we need to give much more attention to is what our family looks like spiritually. The importance of our paying attention to how our family is doing spiritually is emphasized in the Bible passages where Paul addresses issues related to the home. In both Ephesians 5 & 6 and Colossians 3 where Paul writes commands from God to the various members of the family, the issue of being controlled by the Spirit is addressed. In Ephesians 5:18, just before the exhortations to the family in Ephesians 5:21-6:3, we are commanded to be filled or controlled by the Spirit. In Colossians 3:16, just before the exhortations to the family in Colossians 3:18-21, we are commanded to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly. The Spirit of God uses the Word as it indwells richly in our life to control and direct us. The reason it is important that we evaluate what our homes look like spiritually is that how we treat our family members is an indicator of the degree to which God's Spirit controls each of us. What should our family look like based on God's Word?

As Paul addresses the responsibilities of each family member, he begins with the one responsible to be subordinate and then proceeds to address the one who is in authority.

Wives, willingly arrange yourselves under your husband's spiritual authority (3:18)

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

Please notice that wives is not qualified. What Paul wrote applies to every Christian wife regardless of any circumstances in which she might find herself. Her submission is not conditioned by her husband's spiritual condition, his actions, or his character. I have observed women justifying their taking over the role of authority in the home because the husband is just never around as he is always off doing his thing or he is unwilling to lead. While there is no excuse for a husband acting in this way, there is nothing that excuses a wife's taking over the role of authority either. If you have a non-leading husband, force the issue by submitting to him anyway. If he doesn't lead, then submit to the things you think he would like. Paul categorically commands of all believing wives that they submit to their husbands.

Please notice also that the command here is in the present tense. This command requires of wives that they continuously submit to their husband. This isn't a one-time decision. It's a decision made over and over again in every situation. At this point, some might ask, "What if a husband asks his wife to do something that is a sin against God?" In this case, it would still be the responsibility of the wife to demonstrate submission in attitude toward her husband. A rebellious, defiant attitude even in this context would be wrong. Just the same, while continuing to be submissive in her attitude, the wife would be required to refuse the sinful action requested by her husband so as to obey and honor her Lord.

The Greek word translated “submit” is a military term that communicates the idea of arranging, subjecting or subordinating oneself under a commanding or ranking officer. When used of the wife’s responsibilities towards her husband, it means that she is to subject herself to or arrange herself under her husband’s ordained authority and leadership as the head of the home. The godly woman will give this response to her husband as is fitting in the Lord.

A common misapplication of the husband- “It is my duty to make my wife submit!”

Notice men, the command for our wife to submit isn’t a command to us. This is her mail from God, if you will, not ours. The act of the wife submitting to her husband’s authority is not something she does under her husband’s compulsion, but it is something she chooses to do willingly, voluntarily, and based on her own initiative as an act of obedience, devotion, and ultimate submission to God. Paul’s words here don’t advocate our forcibly putting our wife in a place of submission. This isn’t something that we can force down our wife’s throat. We can’t obligate our wife to submit as submission has to come from the heart. It has to come from within her.

As Porter writes, Paul’s command here, “has to do with establishing order, not with giving orders...In any united effort, somebody has to have the last word. Otherwise, when there’s disagreement, everybody wants their way. God says that the husband has the final word not to do whatever he wants, but for her welfare. His use of ‘final’ authority should be controlled by his love for her.”

A common misconception- “Submission implies inferiority!”

The command here is one that applies to the role and function of the wife in the home and in no way attributes inferior status to her or puts her down. As Homer Kent writes, “No intimation is given than this subjection is based upon inferiority in intelligence, morality, spirituality, worth, integrity, or any other quality. It is a relationship referring solely to authority.”

That the believing wife has the same standing before the Lord spiritually is made abundantly clear in Galatians 3:28- “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The wife is an equal with her husband whose responsibility before Lord is to willingly function under and in submission to the leadership God has given her husband over the home.

Contrary to the view of some, equality in status and hierarchy in roles and functions can and do coexist. The Son and the Father are equally God and yet the Son submitted to the Father. Likewise, the husband and wife are equal in God’s sight in terms of their status and yet the wife is to function in subjection to her husband’s leadership.

Why Do Husbands & Wives Battle?

Why do wives struggle to submit and husbands struggle to love as they should? The answer can be found in Genesis 3:16b where we read of the curse which came as a consequence of Eve's disobedience of God's command. The curse was, "Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you."

What does this mean? The translation of the Septuagint version of Genesis 3:16 provides helpful insight for interpreting this verse-- "Toward your husband you will turn, but he will lord it over you."

When the woman turns to her husband, desiring him to meet her needs for leadership, she will suffer disappointment due to his tendency to dominate or lord it over her as opposed to leading as God intended.

Understanding the curse, that is the negative effects introduced into the marriage relationship by sin, helps us understand the struggle. However, it doesn't excuse the wife to refuse submission to her husband's leadership, nor does it excuse the husband when he acts in a domineering, harsh, and unloving manner.

Husbands, lead your wife by sacrificially loving her, don't be bitter & harsh (3:19)

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

Please notice again that as it was with the wives, husbands is not qualified. What Paul wrote applies to every Christian husband regardless of any circumstances in which he might find himself. His love for his wife is not conditioned by who she is and what she does. No matter a wife's spiritual condition, actions, or character, her husband needs to love her just the same. Men, it's unconditional love that we are responsible to demonstrate to our wife. Paul categorically commands of all believing husbands that they love their wife. This command is also in the present tense requiring that husbands continuously make a habit or practice of loving their wife.

Husbands need to be careful to treat their wife in the right way.

Negatively, he should not be harsh with her. The Greek word translated "harsh" means literally "to be embittered." It was used to describe the well sharpened tips of arrows. It was also used to describe food that has a bitter or a sharp taste. This word, used of a husband, describes a person who is harsh, critical, angry, bitter. This behavior is never appropriate for the Christian husband. Men, if we have been acting in this way, Paul urges us to stop it.

Positively, husbands are responsible to love their wife. Paul's command of husbands to love their wife clearly went against the grain of his culture. In Paul's day, loving one's wife would have been considered to be a novel thought by some. As Dr. David Jeremiah observes about the world and culture of Paul's day, "a wife was regarded as a thing, not a person; as property to be owned, not a partner to be loved."

Just as it was in Paul's day, the values of the unbelieving world and those of believers are in conflict with one another. For example, our definition of love and the worlds are dramatically different. The love we demonstrate to our wife should be very distinct from the concept of love in the world around us. The world sees love primarily as an emotion which determines how we act towards one another. If the actions of others towards us are considered to be satisfactory, we will stay committed. We as Bible believing Christians flip this all around. We see love primarily as a decision and a commitment which determines how we act towards others. We believe that our emotions are positive when we properly fulfill our commitment to love by acting in the ways God would have us to act toward one another.

We understand that the love that is commanded of husbands towards their wife is agape love. A love that involves the willful commitment on the part of the husband to act always in a selfless manner that will benefit his wife, to seek her best interests and highest good, to care for her needs (i.e. protection, provision), to serve her. This love involves a commitment that shrinks back from nothing, including the need to give of ourselves sacrificially.

Just like the wife's submission, this love requires continuous, daily decisions. Men, we need to commit to giving our wife our love and not our leftovers. Loving our wife as we should means that we will not spend so much time at our work place, at the golf course, with our toys, with our friends that we have little left to give to our wife when we come home. Men, when we are home, we need to be present not only physically, but mentally as well. Don't check out mentally at home by bringing work with you. Again, let's give our wife our love, not our leftovers.

Children, listen to your parents' training and instruction intent on obeying what they tell you to do (3:20)

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

"Children"-this does not refer only to little kids or young children. This Greek term is not limited to a specific age group, but rather it refers to sons and daughters still dependent on their parents for their daily physical needs. As long as the children are living under their parent's roof, they are obligated to obey the command of Scripture given in Colossians 3:20.

The Greek Word translated "obey"-hypakouo-is a compound word made up of two words one meaning "under", and the other meaning "to hear." Literally, the word means to hear or listen under. This word is used in Acts 12:13 of one who responded to a knock at the door and came to listen in order to answer it. Obedience to parents begins with listening. Children, you need to listen attentively to what your parents instruct you to do intent on doing what you have been told. A sure indicator that you as a child are not obeying your parents as you should is when your folks constantly have to say-"Are you listening to me?" "Did you hear what I said?" "Now, listen to me!"

Children, your obedience to God not only involves your obeying your parents in your actions, but it also involves being respectful to them in your attitudes. Paul writes in Ephesians 6:2- "Honor your father and mother."

The extent of obedience-“in everything”

This is yet another instance in which Paul calls for a continuous response in all areas of daily life. Children are to obey their parents in everything. No exception is indicated. Children, whether or not what your parents tell you to do makes sense or seems right to ask of you or seems fair to you, you need to obey them. A child might ask, “What about if my parents ask me to do something that is a sin against God? Must I do wrong if my parent commands me to do so?” In response to this question, Homer Kent writes, “It may be properly assumed that Paul understood Christian parents to be involved from the way he next addresses the fathers. This should avoid most such problems. However, the Scripture teaching is clear that human authority is never absolute, and that in cases of conflict, God must be obeyed rather than man. Paul was not here discussing every conceivable situation, but was laying down a principle. Exceptional cases must be worked out individually in the light of that principle.”

The reasons for obedience:

It pleases the Lord (Colossians 3:20)

Children, if you desire to please and obey God, then you will respond in obedience to your parents. When you obey mom and dad, you are obeying God.

It holds promise of blessing (Ephesians 6:2-3)

The fifth commandment of the ten commandments is the first commandment given that included a promise of blessing to those who obeyed it. The promise given to the Jews in the giving of the ten commandments was originally applied to them as they entered the land of Canaan and was associated with the promise of tangible, physical, earthly blessings.

Paul’s reference in Ephesians shows that there are promises that extend to believers today associated with obeying the command to obey one’s parents. Though these blessings might not be as tangible as those promised to Israel, they are just as significant.

The Bible instructs us that those who obey their parents have the promise of a twofold blessing: 1. “That it may go well with you.”-**quality of living.** 2. “That you may enjoy long life on the earth.”-**quantity of living.**

Quality of life

It is inevitable for each and every one of us that we will one day have to learn the principle of submission to authority. If we learn this at home in response to our parents, it will go well with us. We will be well prepared to respond properly to the other authority figures we will encounter later in life. If we do not learn the principle of submission at home in the context of a loving and somewhat sheltered environment, then we will struggle. Those who have trouble responding to authority have trouble keeping jobs and it is usually the case that things do not go well with them.

Quantity of life

As a general principle, those who obey their parents will enjoy a longer life. Is this to say that all who die tragically at a young age have died early because they disobeyed their parents? Of course not! The Bible is stating the general principle that when children obey their parents in the Lord, they will escape a great deal of sin and danger and thus avoid the things which threaten the quantity of one's life.

As Warren Wiersbe has written, "Sin always robs us; obedience always enriches our life." Sin will rob us of both quality and quantity of life. Obedience will, generally speaking, enrich the quality and add to the length of our lives.

Parents (fathers more specifically), don't constantly irritate your children or they will become discouraged in spirit (Colossians 3:21)

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

The Greek word for Fathers here-pateres- is translated in Hebrews 11:23 "parents" referring to both Moses' mom and dad. It would be appropriate in this verse to understand pateres as referring to both parents since the children are instructed to obey both parents in verse 20.

However, Paul's change of Greek terms in verses 20 and 21 may have been deliberate as a means of communicating to fathers that as the head of their households, are ultimately held responsibility for directing their children's behavior, and so are addressed specifically.

The Greek word translated embitter means to stir, arouse, or provoke and is used mostly in the bad sense of irritating or exasperating. Parents, don't continually provoke your children to irritation. If you fail to heed this command, they will become discouraged or disheartened. They will become listless and sullen and lack motivation. Their heart and spirit will be taken right out of them. What is it that parents do which irritates their kids and if done continually causes them to become disheartened?

Parents irritate their children by:

Never admitting wrong doing- If we excuse, justify, and rationalize our own mistakes and refuse to admit them, we will irritate our children.

Failing to keep promises- If we rarely follow through on what we say we are going to do, we will irritate our children.

Being overly demanding- If we accept nothing less than perfection and constantly catch and point out every failure, if we set unrealistic expectations for our children, never rewarding them or letting them feel like they have succeeded, if we never communicate approval, but only criticism, we will irritate our children.

Being overly protective of them- If we limit the freedom and independence of our children no matter their age and make all their decisions for them and give them few opportunities to fail and allow nothing they do to earn our trust, we will irritate them. They will start to believe that their behavior is irrelevant since there is nothing that they seem to do that will grant them greater privileges or win our trust.

Failing to discipline or failing to discipline consistently- If we are firm at one time about a matter in our discipline and are very lenient during another time, if we enforce a rule sometimes and don't others, if we don't enforce a rule at home, but do enforce it in front of another church family because of our desire for that family to think we are good parents, if we don't discipline because it has been a long day and we can't take any more, we will irritate our children.

Disciplining our children out of anger rather than doing so as an expression of love and as a means of instructing and training them- If we just spank our children without instructing them and training them, if we spank them only when they have made us mad enough to finally address their disobedient behavior, we will irritate them.

Excessive or abusive discipline – If we say things to our kids that we would never say to anyone else, things that are verbally and emotionally abusive, if we cause physical harm to our kids, we will irritate them. If guilty of this irritating behavior, stop it. If you can't, get help.

Showing favoritism- If we unfavorably compare one child to another, if we give either unequal discipline or unequal praise to our different children, we will irritate them.

Consistently believing the worst of our children- If we expect the worst of children, if we predict their failure, they will probably live up to our expectations and we will irritate them in so doing.

Communicating to our children that they are unwanted- If we treat our children as if they are an inconvenience to us, if we tell other parents not to have so many children because of what they can be like when they are two or teenagers, we will irritate them.

Neglecting our children- If we let our children know that we are always too busy to give them positive time and if we only spend time with them when they need discipline, we will irritate them.

Not listening to your children- If we act irritated and uninterested when our children express themselves, we will irritate them.

Holding back verbal and physical affection- If we don't communicate our love by saying "I Love You" and by giving our children hugs and kisses, we will irritate them.

Saying no to everything or yes to everything- If we say no constantly without any rhyme or reason or because we just don't feel like being bothered, we will irritate our children. As Christian parents, there are many things we have to say no to because of biblical, health, and moral

reasons. We need to say yes when we can.

If on the other hand we are always saying yes or will say yes if our children pester or beg us enough, if we overindulge our children causing them to assume that we will let them have their every request, we are irritating our children.

Embarrassing our children- If we scold or discipline our children in front of other people and talk openly to others about your child's weaknesses and mistakes, we will irritate them.

This list is exemplary, not exhaustive. It helps us to look at our own fail as parents. Kids, God's command of your parents not to embitter you is their "mail from God", not yours. It is not your place to tell your parents how they need to be. Your only concern is that you obey them for this pleases the Lord.

Conclusion: What does your family look like? This is what you and I need to desire our family to look like and it will if we will submit to the control of the Holy Spirit:

Wife, willingly submit to your husband.

Husband, sacrificially love your wife.

Children, listen to your parents intent on obeying them.

Parents, don't irritate or dishearten your kids.