

## Introduction

I once visited a couple who had a framed embroidery hanging on their living room wall. It simply said "Home Sweet Home." Let me ask you a question about that. If that embroidery were hanging in your home, would it be true? Maybe not. The fact is that our homes can be either heaven or hell on earth. More than any other place, they have the potential to be either the best or worst places in our lives.

That's why I read the passage I did, Colossians 3:18-21. In it, Paul tells us what we have to do to make our homes the best places and not the worst in our lives. A cursory reading of the text shows us that making them that involves everyone in them – spouses, children, and parents. Let's take a look at what Paul teaches us about that.

## Wives

He begins with wives in verse 18. He commands, "***Wives be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.***"

Let me quickly say that there isn't anything denigrating about doing that. Many women think there is, like the one, in a pre-marital counseling session, who told me that Paul was a male chauvinist for even saying it. But if we understand the verse, we realize he wasn't.

Paul's first century culture considered wives the absolute property of their husbands. They had no choice but to subject themselves to everything their husbands said. That made this command a scandalous one. It assumed something that the culture didn't – that wives had the choice of not subjecting themselves to their husbands. Paul was making decision makers here of those whom the culture forbade to make decisions, wives.

With that in mind, notice the decision he tells wives to make. Subject yourselves to your husbands. That means don't insist on having your own way. Submit to your husbands instead. Act as if their rights, desires, and needs are more important than yours are. You don't do that

of course if it's destructive. But otherwise you do it!

You do it, according to verse 18, "***as is fitting in the Lord.***" You don't do it because it's your station in life and you don't have any other choice. You do it because you love Jesus and it's His way. It's primarily on His behalf, in other words, and not the behalf of your husbands.

For instance, I've told you before that my wife Jill is an outstanding cook. But she isn't a fulfilled cook. The problem is that I'm a simple eater. I like basic dishes that aren't complicated with things like spices and cheese. Jill once gave me a stack of 40 creative recipes from a cookbook and asked me to pick the ones I would honestly enjoy. I picked out three of them. She says something that I don't deny. I'm the most boring person on planet earth to cook for. And yet she subjects herself to me. She cooks the kinds of meals that I like even though she'd love to do otherwise - and doesn't complain about it.

Wives, subject yourselves to your husbands. Act as if their rights, desires, and needs are more important than your own are.

## **Husbands**

Having told wives what they should do, Paul moves on to husbands in verse 19. He commands, "***Love your wives and do not be embittered against them.***" What a transforming command that is.

Sociologist Willard Wallard articulated a principle that is inherent in verse 19. He called it "the principle of least interest." According to Wallard, the person who has the least love and is the least interested in maintaining a relationship exercises the most power and control over it. That person with "the least interest" is thus able to dominate the other person. We see that all the time in marriages don't we? Sometimes, it's wives but usually it's husbands. They have less love than their wives do. They are less interested in the marriage, in the relationship, than their wives are. They are, therefore, able to dominate and control and do.

A pastor tells about counseling a couple that was having marital problems. The wife blurted out, "***I can't remember the last time he***

*said, 'I love you.'*" To which her husband responded: *"When I married you twenty-eight years ago, I told you that I loved you, and I said if I ever changed my mind I'd let you know."* That husband was obviously far "less interested" in the relationship than his wife was.

That's the way that most husbands are but we shouldn't be. Verse 19 says we should love our wives – as Jesus loves the church, according to Ephesians 5:25. Husbands, we shouldn't be less interested in our marriage relationships than our wives are. Based on Ephesians 5:25, we should actually be more interested in them than they are. You may think that's emasculating but it isn't. It's simply our call as disciples of Jesus.

Answering that call works itself out in many practical and sundry ways. Last year, for instance, the Holy Spirit convicted me that I needed to do two things in my marriage relationship that I hadn't been doing. #1 – Make whatever is important to my wife important to me. And #2 – listen attentively to everything she says. So, I made and am trying to carry out the decision to do those two things. Why? It's because I'm a disciple of Jesus and want to do what He says in verse 19.

What He says is "the principle of **most** interest." Husbands, let's be "the most interested," not "the least interested," in our marriages.

## **Children**

Now let's go to verse 20 and what Paul says to children. The word "children" here encompasses those who are 18 years old and under and still living at home. Since most of our 12 year olds and under are in junior church, I'm speaking to teenagers now. Paul's command to you is, *"be obedient to your parents in all things."* He didn't say, "some things" or "the things you like" or "the things you agree with." He said obey them "in all things," unless of course it's un-Biblical or immoral.

The problem is that many if not most teenagers aren't doing that. They aren't obeying all the things their parents tell them to do. Popular author Barbara Johnson wrote this to your parents: *"The smartest advice on raising children is to enjoy them while they're still on*

***your side.***" She's implying of course that most children, especially teenagers, aren't on their parents' side. Maybe you're one of those.

There's a primary reason if you are. It's that your parents aren't the only socializing influence in your lives. Take MTV for instance. One of its officers once bragged to a group of parents, "***We don't influence your children; we own them.***" The arrogance of that! They own you. And yet there's a great deal of truth to it. MTV and other forces, including your peers and friends, are strong socializing influences in your lives. Maybe even stronger than your parents are.

That's problematic though because many of the things they're telling you conflict with what your parents are telling you. So, to whom will you listen - MTV and those other forces or your parents? For your own sake, you need to objectively ask and answer two questions in deciding that.

First, why do your parents tell you to do things? Unless they're monsters, it's because they love you. They care about your well-being and joy, far more than anyone else does. I used to tell my sons when they were teenagers: "***There are two people on earth who think you're special and love you far more than they do themselves. Those two people are your mother and I.***" The same thing is probably true of you. Do you want to know the truth? The producers of MTV couldn't care less about you. And your friends and peers care less about you than they do themselves. But your parents, hopefully are different. They think you're special and love you more than they do themselves.

There's a second question you need to ask and answer. Why do your parents tell you to do the things they tell you to do? It's because they know about life. You may think that the producers of MTV, your peers and friends, and you know a whole lot more about life than your parents do. But what makes you think that? If you're honest, it's probably that they tell you what you want to hear and your parents don't. But that's a foolish reason. It's highly likely. Your parents know more about life in general and your life in particular than the producers of MTV, your peers and friends, and yes, even you do.

So teenagers, that's your situation. On the one hand, you have your parents telling you what to do. On the other hand, you have others telling you what to do. But your parents care far more about you and know more about life than the others do. It only makes sense, therefore, it's only logical that you listen to them. Listening to them does two things. First, verse 20 says it pleases God. And second, in the long run, it protects and promotes your well-being and joy. You may not care about the long run but for your own sakes you had better try to.

So that's the message of verse 20. Going back to Barbara Johnson's quote, I'd say it this way. Teenagers, most of your parents are on your side. So be on theirs. Be obedient to them in all things.

## **Parents**

The final family members to whom Paul writes are parents, in verse 21. He does address fathers here but the same thing can be said to mothers, ***"Do not exasperate your children."***

Exasperating children is about the soul. The soul is the life-center of the human being. It regulates what is occurring in his or her other dimensions - the mental, emotional, and volitional. When the soul is healthy, the person "has it together." When it's unhealthy, the person "doesn't have it together." Parents, your job is twofold in that regard.

First, you must nourish the souls of your children. According to the Bible, you do that by teaching, commanding, disciplining, and modeling kingdom goodness. I've preached about those before.

Second, parents, you must not diminish the souls of their children. That's what verse 21 is about. To exasperate children means to diminish their souls. Certainly, no decent parent would do that intentionally. But we know by observation that many do it unintentionally. They do things that diminish their children's souls and don't even seem to know it.

C.S. Lewis reveals what a few of those things are in his book *The Four Loves*. He writes: ***"Dogmatic assertions on matters which the children understand and their elders don't, ruthless interruptions,***

*flat contradictions, ridicule of things the young take seriously, insulting references to their friends, all provide an easy answer to the question "Why are they always out?"* Parents do other things that exasperate their children: live out their dreams through them, expect more from them than they're capable of giving or doing, casually dismiss what's important to them, keep them overly active, don't allow them to make age appropriate decisions, have conflicting expectations of them, don't spend enough time with them, treat them unfairly, are mean to them, and more. Verse 21 states what the consequence of those things is. It makes children lose heart. It discourages and disheartens them.

I've talked with and counseled many such children over the years. Like one frustrated teenager, for instance, whose parents wanted him to be popular and spiritual, in that order. *"I can't do both,"* he cried out and he couldn't. Those are usually mutually exclusive things. Or like another who lamented that her parents had her in so many extracurricular activities that *"I hardly have time to breathe,"* to quote her.

Parents, you need to regularly and objectively examine yourselves as parents. You need to identify what you're doing with your children and what the consequences of what you're doing are on them. Nourish the souls of your children. Don't diminish or even destroy them.

## **Conclusion**

So those are Paul's commands to spouses, children, and parents. You can see that verses 18-21 are a family affair. It's all of us in our homes doing our own Biblical part. I leave you in closing with the words of a poem that sums up well what our part is. It's titled *More and Less* and goes like this: *"More kindness and less greed; more giving and less need; more smiles and less frown; less kicking people when they're down; more 'we' and less 'I'; more laughs and less cry; more flowers on the pathway of life; and fewer on graves at the end of the strife."* Follow Jesus and live out verses 18-21 in His power. "Home Sweet Home" will be true of yours if you do.