

The Core: Living with Jesus at the Center

Jesus-Centered Families

Colossians 3:18-21

Mark Vroegop

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged (Col 3:18-21).

Christianity is supposed to be very practical. God never intended for there to be a separation between what we believe and how we live. On the contrary, his design is to transform our hearts and fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we will be radically different in every area of life. In other words, Jesus is gloriously invasive. His very nature demands it. A Jesus-centered life is simply the natural extension of understanding who he is.

Our journey through Colossians has us in a section that identifies what Jesus-centered living looks like. This focus began in 3:5, and it continues through the end of the book which will end for us on November 30th.

The text this morning – Colossians 3:18-4:1 – highlights the extensive invasiveness of Jesus. Paul applies the concept of Christ being the core to marriage, family, and work. Notice how Jesus-centered the following statements are:

- “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (3:18)
- “Husbands, love your wives” (3:19) “as Christ loved the church...” (Eph 5:25)¹
- “Children, obey your parents...this pleases the Lord” (3:20)
- “Slaves, obey...your earthly masters...fearing the Lord” (3:22), “work heartily, as for the Lord” (3:22), “you are serving the Lord Christ” (3:24)
- “Masters, treat your slaves justly...knowing you have a Master in Heaven” (4:1)

Our Invasive Jesus

So the section that we are in makes a pretty clear point: life is connected to Jesus. Jesus gloriously invades marriage, family, and work. Or to say it a different way: Jesus-centeredness affects every area of life. This fits, doesn't it, with what we read in 3:17 – “Whatever you do, in

¹ I am assuming that this is what Paul has in mind in Colossians since he communicates it so clearly in other passages of the Bible.

word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus..." The motivation for everything we have here is Christ.

Therefore, there are two key things to see here:

Consistency – there is a clear pattern in the text: the Lordship of Christ is brought to bear on every arena of life. The beautiful and transforming truth here is simply the fact that Jesus can transform everything in your life beginning with your heart. Therefore, there is never a position in life where you cannot honor Christ. Obedience to the Lordship of Jesus is not dependent on your role or function. Jesus transforms the role.

Uniqueness – while there is a common theme – the Lordship of Christ – the way that is expressed is unique to the different people and roles that are addressed. Children honor the Lordship of Christ differently than their parents. Husbands do so differently than their wives. Masters do it differently than slaves.

Therefore our individual obligation is to take the roles that God has given us and determine the unique ways that we are to express our submission to Christ. God's design is not a uniformity of roles; his design is a uniformity of relationship to Christ. And this results in unique expressions of Jesus-centeredness through your God-given role.

Now if you think about it that is really beautiful! It acknowledges the uniqueness of roles in life, but it unites them under the banner of the Lordship of Christ. Wives, husbands, children, father, slaves, and masters all have different roles, but they are united in centrality of Jesus. And to make it all work we are given Holy Spirit and the command to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:15).

Why is this important? Two reasons:

1. **Some people resist their role thinking that they could obey or honor Jesus more if circumstances were changed.** Some think that their role hinders complete or ultimate obedience. Husbands who'd rather not lead, children who resist authority, wives who see submission as a curse, employees who think they know how to do a boss' job better, or employers who try to disconnect the Lordship of Jesus from daily business operations. But Jesus calls us to embrace those roles and transform them.
2. **Some people think that a distinction of roles equals a difference of value or equality.** They mistakenly equate value with function. You might have a husband who is a bit of a dictator, a wife who believes that submission is marital slavery, a child who resists obedience because she "is a person too", an employee views herself as less valuable than other people on her team, or a boss who treats her employees with

disdain. Jesus takes each of those roles and gives them new value, meaning, and purpose.

But Jesus does something even more: he personally provides an example, through his life, as to how you are to live these out. In other words, he shows husbands how to love, wives how to submit, children how to obey. He models everything he commands. So every role finds its meaning, example, and motivation in the person of Jesus.

Having set the big picture principles of consistency and uniqueness in place, let's look at two expressions of this in children and men.

Expressions of Jesus-Centeredness:

Verses 18-21 address the roles of family members, and I'd like to look at these in a little different order than you find them in the text. We are going to look at children and husbands today, and in two weeks we will look at wives, slaves, and masters. Although that is not the order of the text, that grouping will be helpful because there are some interpretative and hermeneutical challenges specifically related to scriptures about slaves and women that I want to talk about. So today I will confine my thoughts to children and men.

God gives each of us roles, and in those roles he wants us to express the centrality of Jesus. For children that equals obedience. For men, that equals a gentle and loving approach to life.

Obedient Children (v 20)

Children are instructed to "obey their parents in everything for this pleases the Lord." Now there are two key words here: obey and please. The word "to please" means something that is enjoyable, acceptable, and that which makes someone happy. Obedient children make the heart of God to be filled with joy. So the ultimate motivation for children is not just the happiness or joy of their parents. It is the joy of Jesus.

The word obey is an important word. It is directly tied to both listening and acting. In other words obedience means that a child hears what Mom and Dad say, and then they act upon what is said. The Bible links hearing instruction, receiving instruction, and acting upon it.

So kids you need to realize that obedience means two key things: first, listening to what your Mom and Dad say, and secondly, doing what they say. Obedience requires both – hearing and action.

Kids I want you to treat the sound of your parents' voice and their instruction like a fire alarm not elevator music. Do you know what I mean? Elevator music is the soothing or annoying music in the background that you don't listen really listen to or even sing along. But a fire

alarm is designed to move you to action. The difference between elevator music and a fire alarm is the importance of what it is trying to communicate. And your parents' instructions are really important.

I also want you to realize that being an obedient child communicates something incredibly powerful about you, your parents, and about Jesus. In a world of rampant disrespect, disobedience, and rebellion children who obey their parents send a powerful message to the world. Now my kids are far from perfect, but I cannot tell you how many times we have had people come up to us at a restaurant after they have observed us pray for our meal and enjoy our family time together. Respectful, obedient children are pleasing to the Lord.

And parents you need to communicate that your words are important. Now be balanced here, but be careful about repeating yourself so many times or counting 1-2-3 before you expect obedience. Eventually your children will learn that they really don't need to heed your words until you are serious. Help them and train them to value your words.

Children, listen and obey your parents. It is the way that you honor Jesus.

Loving and Gentle Men (vv 19, 21)

In verses 18 and 21 we see that men are addressed as both husbands and fathers. While the roles are different there is something consistent between them – a servant leadership. A godly husband and father is a gentle giant of a man. The strength of his person and his position become the platforms from which he dispenses love and gentleness.

First, it is important to understand that nature of a man's position in the home. The Bible calls men to a role of **headship in the home**.

3 But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God (1 Cor 11:3).

23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior (Eph 5:23).

But what does this mean? It means that God has given man a unique (not better) role in providing a pace-setting model for his family. A man has been given the primary responsibility for leading a home. Now understand that this doesn't mean a solo responsibility. It means that a man has been given the call from God to be the initiator at home.

The headship of a man should neither be denied nor abused. Denying it would mean that as a husband you refuse to lead or as a wife you refuse to allow your husband to lead. Denying it would be to incorrectly link headship with value, determining that a husband and wife have

equal and identical roles. To abuse it would be for a husband to view himself as the king of a castle and treat his family like subjects to be ruled. Further, it should not be confused with superiority. To be the leader doesn't mean that you are more valuable, intelligent, or even more competent. Spiritual leadership assumes none of that. But what it does assume is that you are responsible and you are taking initiative. Let me say it very plainly: Men, you cannot be passive.

At our marriage retreat two weeks ago, a husband asked me a great question. He said, "Mark, I'm a terrible planner, and my wife is excellent at it. How do I lead my home in planning when my wife is so much better at it?" My answer was, "I'm not suggesting that in order to be the leader in your home that you have to do all the planning. But you need to be the one to determine that it's important and decide when you are going to do it together. You take the initiative, set up the time, and utilize your wife's gifts. That's wise leadership."

Secondly, a man looks to Christ for his example and images Jesus in his role as husband and father. In what ways does he accomplish this? He does this by **loving his wife**. Verse 19 says that explicitly. However, there are two other texts that help us regarding this subject:

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself (Eph 5:25-28).

7 Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered (1 Peter 3:7).

But the meaning is connected to how Jesus loved the church. Ephesians 5:25 is clear: "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her." So a husband is to know Christ and his love for the church is such a way that it becomes his model for loving his wife.

And there is something deeply spiritual about a gentle and understanding man. His understanding of his wife is directly tied to his spiritual life, thus the statement – so that your prayers may not be hindered. It is a stunning thing to me that God is not interested in the prayer of men who are not interested in understanding their wives.

So, at the heart of this idea of loving one's wife is a deep-seat commitment to sacrificial and servant leadership—a commitment to be like Jesus. And this shows up in the following ways:

- A deep commitment to be a spiritually vibrant man
- A willingness to lead the family spiritually
- A nourishing and cherishing of his wife
- A relentless desire to make the most of the stewardship our lives
- An aggressive desire to resolve conflict
- A passion to understand and know the needs of the family

The third and final piece responsibility for men relates to **words**, which is probably the most obvious expression of servant leadership or the lack thereof. Men are cautioned here about words to their wives, and I think by inference, to their children.

Men are not to be harsh with their wives or provoke their children. Verse 19 says, "love your wives and don't be harsh with them." Other translations render this statement as "don't be embittered toward them" (NASB, NKJV, KJV). The word for "harsh" means pointed, sharp, painful, or embittered. It is used in James 3:11 for the taste of bitter water or like butter milk in a glass that you thought was 2%. A gentle giant of a man means that you understand that words land differently on the heart of your wife.

In verse 21 fathers are told to avoid provoking their children, lest they become discouraged. Now there are certainly many ways that a father's actions can provoke discouragement in his kids, but I think that the main way that we do that is through our words. To provoke to discouragement means that you use language and tones that create a disheartened spirit or a crushing blow to the spirit. Words, tones, or even the absence of affirmation can easily do that.

Men, we've got to understand that direct, pointed, and even harsh words may be the way that "stuff gets done" in our world or at work, but they create rebellion and chaos at home. You can get what you want and make your point with harsh words, but the end product will be a shrinking heart in your children and your wife. Therefore, men I want to call you to a loving and gentle demeanor that begins in the heart but comes out of your mouth.

Men, embrace your God-given role, love your wife and children with great tenderness and compassion, and let your words be the gracious flavor of your home. Set the pace!

Called to be like Jesus

Everything is connected to Jesus, and I find it stunning that in everything that we've talked about this morning – from the overview to the specifics regarding children or men – Jesus became our ultimate pace-setter. Being obedient children or loving and gentle men flow out of an understanding of what Jesus is like. We look to him and follow him in the various roles that God has given us. Consider the following:

- Jesus became a human being, embracing a subservient role to the Father even though he is equally God (“who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men”- Phil 2:6-7)
- Jesus was obedient to the will of the Father, learning obedience through suffering (“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him”- Heb 5:8-9)
- Jesus initiated reconciliation, pursued us when we were undeserving, paid the greatest price, and continues to be faithful in spite of countless failures (“...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”- Eph 5:25; “...nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church” – Eph 5:29)

Headship and loving my wife combine into a powerful motivation to do what is right. Sarah and I had an argument this week that highlighted this very clearly for me. The argument was over a phone jack and cable TV jack. In our kitchen we have both of these jacks in a very obvious place in the kitchen. We don't use either of them, and we were discussing a tile project that we would like to do. I was assuming that we would keep the jacks. She was assuming that we would cover them up. I was thinking about the re-sale of the house (“If we ever sell this house, I'm going to have figure out how to rewire all that.”) She was thinking of the look of the kitchen (“So we are going to have these two ugly jacks in our kitchen for years?”). Needless to say the conversation ended with me saying, “Just have the tile guy call me, and I'll figure something out.” What I was really saying was, “this discussion is over.” I went to the computer and she went to the television, and there we sat for about 10 minutes. Now this situation has to be resolved, and I became convicted about my bad attitude. The responsibility for reconciliation is equally shared by both of us, but I have a greater responsibility for initiating it. And so, after searching my heart, I made the long walk up the stairs to the bedroom. As I opened the door I said, “I'm sorry”, and with that we both started laughing. Sarah said she was sorry as well, and we worked through the issue. But I must tell you that the hardest part of the entire exchange was making the choice to walk up those stairs. But the reality is that I needed to, not only because it was right but also because I bear a greater responsibility as head of the home.

A Jesus-centered home is filled with people with different roles, but the unifying commitment is to honor the Lordship of Christ. Children, you must do that through obedience. Men, we must do it through intentional servant leadership. All of us – children, husbands, and next week women, slaves and masters – are called to be like Jesus.

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com