



LifeGroups

GROWING TOGETHER IN THE GOSPEL

Growth Sheet

A Christ-Centered Family

Colossians 3:18-21

In the flow of Paul's letter to the Colossians, it is natural that he now addresses specific sets of people—wives, husbands, children, bondservants, and masters. After all, since believers have been “raised with Christ” (3:1) and since they are to do “everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (3:17), this new whole-life focus will transform their most basic relationships.

But what shape will these relationships take? What does it look like when wives, husbands, and children do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus?

Repressive Rules or Recipe for a Happy Family? Neither.

Of all the parts of this letter, it would be easiest for us to chop these commands from the root of Paul's argument, and embrace or reject them for the wrong reasons.

On the one hand, a “conservative,” traditionally-minded, family-valuing person might embrace these commands, assuming that they are God's recipe for a happy family. On the other hand, a “liberal” person might view these commands as outmoded and repressive because they seem to downplay individual expression and freedom. Both approaches miss the essential point here. Jesus Christ—not self, children, or even marriage—must be at the center of family life.

The “traditional” person who assumes that this passage is God's recipe for a happy family might be shocked to learn that obedience to this passage may *or may not* result in a “happy family.” Jesus himself said, “I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother . . . and a person's enemies will be those of his own household” (Matthew 10:35-36). And the “progressive” person who thinks that this passage is repressive may be surprised to learn that *this* household code—in contrast to other ancient household codes—radically elevates the individual status of women and children.

When read in view of believers' status as “raised with Christ,” Paul's commands become clear. There is something even *more* valuable than marriage, family, and individual freedom. The submission of wives to their husbands, the love of husbands for their wives, and the obedience of children to their parents—these duties are done ultimately *for the sake of Christ*—that is, enabled by his life and motivated for his glory.

A Christ-Centered Family

These commands to family members are the way believers are to live out their allegiance to Christ in their God-given roles.

In a Christ-centered family . . .

- 1. Wives submit to their husbands.**



A wife's submission does not imply that she is inferior. This is evident from the fact that Paul used this same word to describe Christ's relationship to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:28), though both Son and Father are clearly coequal (John 10:30). In startling contrast to the culture of Paul's time, the wife's responsibility to submit is not grounded in the idea that she is inferior, but in the built-in order of things. Different roles exist even among equals. Neither does her submission depend on whether or not her husband deserves it, for she submits "as is fitting *in the Lord*."

2. Husbands love their wives.

Although wives are also expected to love their husbands (Titus 2:4), the love of husbands for their wives is especially emphasized both here and in Ephesians 5. Like the wife's submission to her husband, the husband's love for his wife calls for radical selflessness modeled on the sacrificial love of Christ for his church (see Ephesians 5:25-33). The active nature of this love challenges men who tend to be passive toward their wives. Both husbands and wives must abandon their deeply ingrained tendencies to selfishness, not because each deserves it, but because Christ does.

3. Children obey their parents.

Paul directly addressed children (referring to children young enough to be dependent on their parents) in a way that was countercultural. Instead of being considered second-rate persons, children are given dignity, not disregarded, by this command. There is no age discrimination in the call to live out one's life in Christ. It is true that common sense and ancient wisdom calls for children to obey those who care for them; but in this passage, children's obedience to parents is given a distinct motivation and purpose: "for this pleases the Lord" (Colossians 3:20).

4. Parents encourage (not dishearten) their children.

The word translated "fathers" can refer to parents of either sex. Parents (perhaps fathers especially) tend to be so harsh and demanding that they provoke resentment in their children. Children naturally crave to please their father. But a father who can never be pleased may eventually become the object of his child's deep-seated, long-lasting bitterness, resulting in a child's being deeply disheartened. At the root of a father's harshness is his self-centeredness, which must be abandoned for the sake of Jesus. Instead, fathers and mothers should seek to cultivate courage and joy in their children, modeling the grace they have been shown in Jesus.

Questions for Application and Discussion

1. Describe what might happen when someone assumes that this passage is God's recipe for a "happy family," tries it, and discovers that it doesn't make a "happy family."
2. In our culture, what objections might people have against the command for wives to submit to their husbands? How would you answer those objections?
3. Which seems to be more difficult—a wife's submission to her husband, or a husband's sacrificial love of his wife? What do these duties have in common?
4. What is true about parents (perhaps dads especially) that required Paul to tell them not to "provoke [their] children, lest they become discouraged"? What can parents do to *encourage* their children instead?