

Main Idea: In Colossians 3:15-21, we learn there are two ways to think about family roles. First, there’s a general principle, a mindset that’s vital (15-17). Then come the specifics (18-21).

- I. A general principle—put Christ first (15-17).
 - A. Let the peace of Christ rule in you (15).
 - B. Let the word of Christ dwell in you (16).
 1. We’re to teach it to one another.
 2. We’re to sing it to God.
 - C. Let the name of Christ influence all you do and say (17).
 - II. Specific guidelines—please Christ by embracing family roles (18-21).
 - A. Wives are to submit to their husbands (18).
 1. Differing roles make the family stronger.
 2. Accepting one’s role is a way to please Christ.
 - B. Husbands are given two commands (19).
 1. He is to love her.
 2. He is not to be bitter towards her.
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 1. Do it constantly and completely.
 2. Do it to please the Lord.
 - D. Fathers are told what *not* to do (21).
 1. Don’t provoke your children.
 2. If you do, you will dishearten them.
- Make It Personal: Is our family functioning God’s way?
1. Take care of first things first.
 2. Thank the Lord every day for grace.

We are a family and today, as a church family, we’ll come together to the Lord’s Table to remember our Savior. To prepare ourselves for this important family time, we now place ourselves under the voice of the One who shed His blood for us, to hear what He has to say to us about the family.

This is the final message in our Christian family series.² We began with eight messages from the book of Genesis, for we wanted to see how the Creator intended the family to function. And so we looked carefully at the first marriage, the first sin, the first excuse, the first children, the first sacrifice, and so forth.

Then, with that foundation in place, we moved to the New Testament, to Colossians 3. We’re learning how family is to function this side of the cross, and thus far we’ve seen that if we belong to Christ, the evidence should be seen in our priorities, communication, and forgiveness. And there’s no more area, which is today’s message.

Roles. If we are going to maximize our joy as families, it’s vital that we embrace our God-given roles. Roles are vital. Think of a basketball team where everybody wants to be a shooter. It doesn’t work. A good team is made up of players who know their roles and work together to fulfill them.

The same goes for the family. How should we think about roles in the family? We’ll find the answer today in Colossians 3:15-21.

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:15-21

How are decisions made in your family? Who decides what you’re going to do with your tax return, or where you’re going on vacation, or whether the kids will play travel ball? Who takes out the trash, cleans the table after a meal, changes the oil in the car,

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached at WBC in 2012.

² Next week, the Lord willing, we’ll begin a summer series entitled, “Christ: The Object of It All.”

holds the tv remote, leads the prayer before meals? Who drives when you're together in the car? Who cares for the children's personal needs?

Who does what in the family, and does it really matter? And if it matters, why? These questions, and many others, have to do with roles.

Every family has a perspective on roles, even the family that says we don't have roles but equally share in everything. What we want to do this morning, as we do every time we gather, is open God's Word and find out what He says.

God designed the family. Since He did, He knows what it takes for a family to flourish, and how the various persons in the family should function for His pleasure and theirs too.

Here's the reality. We can't do family any old way and expect the results to be His glory and our joy. The hymn says it well, *Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

So what did He say? In order to be a family that functions God's way, He tells us in Colossians 3:15-21 that we need to take to heart two types of instruction. First, we need to grasp a general principle, and then embrace some specific guidelines that build on that principle. Frankly, once we grasp the principle (which we'll spend quite a bit of time on in this message), then the specifics sort of fall into place.

I. A general principle—put Christ first (15-17).

The message of Colossians is that Christ deserves to be first. Christ is the preeminent One according to 1:18. Indeed, when you read the first two chapters of Colossians, you see Paul putting the spotlight on Christ's supremacy, sufficiency, and superiority.

The preeminent One has a right to be preeminent in our lives. But the question is, *how? How does that happen?*

In chapters 3 and 4 Paul shows us how we put Him first in practical terms. We read in 3:1 (NIV), "Since then you have been raised with Christ [this is a letter to Christians, to people who know Christ], set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated..." And verse 2, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."

In other words, if you know Christ, then seek Christ *first*. How do you do it? It doesn't happen automatically. According to verses 5-15 you must "put off" some things, and then "put on" some things too. But the key to it all, as we'll see in the text before us is the *Word* (15-17).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. That word *you* is key and here's why.

Right now you may be thinking, "Okay, give it to me straight. I'm a Christian, but how do I put Christ first in my life?" And the answer is, *you can't do it alone*. The instructions that Paul is giving us in chapter three are to "you" *plural*.

This is a local church assignment. It takes the whole church for the word of Christ to dwell in us individually. We are not marbles in a bag. We are a body, His body, and the various members are connected. Christ saved us with the intent that we would function in vital connection with the other parts of His Body, specifically in a local church.

In order to put Him first, we must make three choices that involve our relationships with the rest of His people.

A. Let the peace of Christ rule in you (15). As you listen to verse 15, keep the plural "you" in mind. "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful."³

³ The NIV gives a little different slant, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace."

If we're putting first, it will show up in our treatment of the peace of Christ. Just what is the "peace of Christ?"⁴ Christ is our peace (Eph. 2:14). He is also the source of peace. He is our shalom, and the One who gives us shalom. It's Christ who took away the enmity (the barrier) that separated us from God, and He did this by sacrificing His own life for us on the cross.

But He also takes away enmity between people. He brings sinners to God, and He brings sinners together. It's the latter work Paul has in mind here.

Sometimes people mistakenly use this verse to support a subjective approach to decision-making. They say, "If you want to know the will of God, wait until He gives you His peace." Yet this verse isn't talking about *inner* peace, but *interpersonal* peace, as the second part indicates, where Paul says that as "members of one body, you were called to peace."

We're commanded to let the peace of Christ "rule" in our hearts. The Greek word for "rule" (*brabeueto*) means "to act as an umpire." In the Greek games there were judges (think of an "umpire") who disqualified contestants who broke the rules.

That's what we're supposed to let the "peace of Christ" do in our relationships, at church, and at home. To allow Christ's peace to regulate everything we do. If Christ's peace is our umpire, then we won't excuse interpersonal strife in our families. We'll let Jesus Christ mediate. He's a specialist at producing peace between people.

Please don't miss the purpose clause in verse 15. "To which you were called." The NIV says we were "called to peace." It's part of our reason for existence. Our relationships as Christians are supposed to showcase the peace of Christ.

Is that happening in your home? Are you showcasing His peace? Are you letting the peace of Christ rule in you? Or, is there something else that's ruling you, like strife?

Am I saying that if there's strife it's always because I'm not letting Christ's peace rule? No. Romans 12:18 says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." It's not always possible to have peace. But we must always make sure that if there isn't peace, the reason isn't us.

Verse 15 concludes, "And be thankful." What's the connection between the peace of Christ and thankfulness? When there's peace in our relationships there's cause for appreciation from our lips. If Christ's peace is ruling in us, we should be thankful.

So are you enjoying peaceful relationships at home? Don't take that for granted. If you are, make sure you're thanking the One responsible. And reaffirm your commitment to let the peace of Christ to continue to rule in you.

Putting Christ first involves a second choice. First, let the peace of Christ rule in you.

B. Let the word of Christ dwell in you (16). In the ESV, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

This is an imperative. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you." What does Paul mean by "the word of Christ"? The "of" can be taken in two ways. It can refer to the word spoken *by* Christ, or the word spoken *about* Christ, or both. In either case, this is pointing us to the revealed word, the Scriptures, where we see the word of Christ.⁵

What are we supposed to do with this word of Christ? We're to let it "dwell" in us, a verb that literally means "to be at home in." It's one thing for you to be in the Word, and that's good. It's even better for the Word to be *at home in you*, to have free access to all parts of your life.⁶ Both are necessary. We must be *in the Word* if the Word is to be *in us*.

⁴ Though the KJV has "peace of God," the actual reading is *Christ* who obviously is God.

⁵ H. M. Carson, 90.

⁶ Gromacki, 143.

You say, "How can we tell if the Word is dwelling in us? Is this referring to Scripture memorization?" It's certainly a good thing to memorize God's Word, but we can memorize the Bible and *not* do with it what Paul says must happen. The Word dwelling in us is supposed to produce something, to show up in two tangible ways.

1. *We're to teach it to one another.* "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another (KJV)." *Teaching* emphasizes the positive element, *admonishing* the negative. Both are essential. The ministry of the Word helps people see what God wants them to do, and what *not* to do. And if we're dwelling in the Word, that's what we'll be doing with each other.

And remember the corporate emphasis in this passage. This isn't just a command for the Word to be in "you" as an individual, but to be in "you" (plural) as a church family.

People should be able to say of us at WBC, "If you want to find what God's Word has to say for the problems of life, you can go there. If you're having marriage problems, they can help you. If you're struggling with grief or loneliness or depression or questions about eternal life, they know how to use the Bible to give people hope. The Word is at home there."

This should be our passion, brothers and sisters. We want to be known in this community as a place where the Word dwells.

And to be this kind of church, it requires that each of us individually prioritize being in the Word. We must value learning the Word, which takes time and effort. But it's worth it, for once we learn the Word, we then can live it, and share it.

I'm concerned about what's happening in many churches these days. Warren Wiersbe is right, "There is a danger today, as there was in Paul's day, that local churches minimize the Word of God. There seems to be a lack of simple Bible teaching in Sunday School classes and pulpits. Far more interest is shown in movies, musical performances, and various entertainments than in God's Word. Many saved people cannot honestly say that God's Word dwells in their hearts richly because they do not take time to read, study, and memorize it."⁷

The best thing we can do as a church to help families in this community is teach the Word of God. This is not just the pastor's assignment, or our Sunday School teachers. This passage clearly says that letting the word of Christ dwell in us happens as *we teach and admonish one another*.

But there's something else we're to do with the Word, a second evidence that the Word is at home in us.

2. *We're to sing it to God.* Verse 16 continues (NIV), "And as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

Did you catch that? When the Word is dwelling in us, we will sing. There's a vibrant connection between learning God's Word and singing. It's as if the Word spills out in song. We can't contain it.⁸

What are we to sing? Three expressions of truth. *Psalms*—those are the Old Testament psalms. The Jews had sung them for centuries, and apparently so did the early church. *Hymns*—those are songs of praise, much like psalms but written by New Testament believers. Possibly they were songs that praised God for who He is. *Spiritual songs*—those seem to be songs the church used to recount the good things God had done for them and praise Him for them.

⁷ Wiersbe, p. 140.

⁸ From the beginning, the church was a *singing* church. Barclay, 159.

When the Word is dwelling in our hearts, it affects our lips. Yes, it's possible to sing truth from your lips that hasn't touched your heart, and that's hypocrisy. But if truth has gripped our hearts and we don't sing, that's robbery. God deserves our praise.

Do you sing heartily to Him? Do you sing out in church? Do you sing in your home? You say, "I would, but I don't sing well."

Hold on, my friend. Who gave you the voice you have? And what does the Giver of your voice say He wants you to do it? He wants us to sing. He tells us to sing. He is pleased when we sing, especially when we put our voices together and sing *to Him*.

These are two evidences that the Word of Christ is at home in us. We'll teach it to one another and we'll sing it to Him. Are you doing those two activities? Are they happening in your family? Do you talk about the Bible together, and sing it together?

A couple of suggestions. One, turn on some good Christ-exalting music in your home, and sing along with it. Don't just listen. Sing. Dads, moms, let your kids hear you singing, and encourage them to do the same.

And two, do the same in your car. Don't just be entertained by music. Pick music that will help you in your pursuit to let the word of Christ be at home in you.

The same goes for sound Bible teaching. Listen to good Bible teaching in your home, and while you're commuting in your car.

I remember my parents doing this when I was growing up. The Christian radio station was almost always playing in the kitchen, it seemed. Music. Sermons. News. Reports about missionaries. Children's programs. And it made an impact on me. It said, God and His Word are important to us.

It's worth noting that in the parallel passage, Ephesians 5:18, Paul commands us to be "filled with the Holy Spirit." But here in Colossians 3 we're told to let the Word dwell in us. They're connected. If we want to enjoy the fullness of the Spirit, we must be filled with the word of Christ. They go hand in hand.

We're learning how to put Christ first. To do so you must, first, let the peace of Christ rule in you. Second, let the word of Christ dwell in you.

C. Let the name of Christ influence all you do and say (17). "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Verse 17 is sort of a catch-all verse. Paul says, *whatever you do*. That's pretty comprehensive, isn't it? Yet Paul doesn't stop there. He elaborates, "in word or deed." Your words, that's what you say. Your deeds, that's what you do. Put them together and you have the totality of life.

What should be true of our lives? If Christ is first, it's this. In whatever we do, speech and action, our primary concern will be the name of Christ.

Meaning what? To us, names are basically identification tags, yet in biblical times a name meant so much more. In the Bible a person's name stands for the person, and the name of Christ represents all that He is and has accomplished.

Do you have a checkbook? A check is just a piece of paper until you do what? Sign it. The presence of your name authorizes the bank to withdraw money from your account. When the president puts his name to a piece of paper, he turns that bill into law.

Beloved, we bear the name *Christian* (a term that surprisingly appears only three times in the Bible). *Christian* is a name that reminds us that we belong to Christ. His name, His authority, has been stamped upon us.

It is a significant thing to use His name and call yourself a *Christian*. It's so significant that before we ever say or do anything, we need to ask ourselves two questions.

1. *Will it bring honor to Christ?* The text says, "And whatever you do...do it *all* in the name of the Lord Jesus." All, not part, not some, not even most, but 100% of what we do should be associated with the name of Jesus Christ. It's for Him.

If we do or say anything that does not honor Him, it is sin. So before I buy that piece of merchandise, before I take that job, before I choose that particular entertainment, before I say that word to my spouse or child, I must ask, "Will it bring honor to Christ?"

That's the first question. Here's the second.

2. *Can I thank God while I am doing it?* Verse 17 concludes (NIV), "Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, *giving thanks* to God the Father through him." This is Paul's third emphasis on gratitude in this paragraph. He said, "be thankful" (15), "with gratitude" (16), and "giving thanks" (17). The expression of thanks is important to God.

Paul practiced what he preached. If you'll recall, he was in chains when he wrote this letter (4:18). It's easy for us to give thanks when pleasant things come our way. But we are to give thanks in all circumstances (see also 1 Thes. 5:18).

How's that possible? It's only possible if our aim is to see the name of Christ receiving honor in everything we say and do. If His name is our passion, then what happens to us isn't our prime concern. It's what happens to *Him*. If He chooses to use suffering to reveal Himself to us and to the onlooking world, then we can give thanks to the Father through Him. We're living for a future day, the day we see Him.

This is where we begin in our families, with this general principle. Put Christ first. Is that your aim? I encourage you to let the peace of Christ rule in you, let the word of Christ dwell in you, and let the name of Christ influence all you do and say.

What happens when a family puts Christ first? Think carefully. What is true of Jesus Christ? He is God's Son, right? Think about that word *Son*. Is Christ the same as God the Father? No. He is equal with the Father, but He is a different person, who embraces a different role. He is the *Son*.

Why did Jesus say He came into the world? Listen to His answer in John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to *accomplish his work*." In John 6:38 Jesus says, "For I have come down from heaven, *not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me*."

So Jesus has a distinct role in His relationship with His Father, and He joyfully embraces it, by obeying His Father. So much so that in garden He cries out, "Not my will, but yours be done."

So if we put Him first in our lives, and if we resolve to be like Him, we too will embrace the good roles the Father has given us.

Roles exist in the Trinity. Roles exist in our families too, for we are created in His likeness. What are these roles? That's exactly what God's Word gives us next.

II. Specific guidelines—please Christ by embracing family roles (18-21).

Beginning in verse 18 through 4:1, Paul shows specific groups in the Colossian church how to put Christ first in practical, daily living. He talks pointedly to six household members about their roles. Wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters. In each pair, Paul addresses the subordinate role first.

For our purposes we'll look at the first four groups. If we want to put Christ first, we'll seek to please Christ by embracing the family roles He's designed.

A. Wives are to submit to their husbands (18). "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." Before commenting on the specifics of this verse, let's establish a couple of basic, biblical realities.

1. *Differing roles make the family stronger.* Differing roles are not bad. Equality and submissiveness can co-exist. Is that true? Yes. Listen to these two passages.

1 Corinthians 11:3 “The head of Christ is God.”

1 Corinthians 15:28 “When he has done this [when Christ has handed over the kingdom to His Father], then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.”

Is God the Son equal with God the Father? Yes. But is God the Son also in subjection to God the Father? Does He possess a support role? Yes. So differing roles are not bad at all. There are differing roles in the Trinity, in the God-given institutions of the church, government, and the family. All parties possess equal worth, but distinct roles.

2. *Accepting one's role is a way to please Christ.* Notice how Paul mentions the Lord in connection with family roles. “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting *in the Lord.*” Notice verse 20 also, “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this *pleases the Lord.*” Why were slaves to obey their masters? Out of reverence *for the Lord* (22). Likewise, masters were to fulfill their role with *the Master* in mind (4:1).

So this is about pleasing Christ. And this means, when we ignore our roles, or worse, reject them, the One who embraced His role by humbling Himself to rescue us isn't pleased. And when He isn't pleased, we short-circuit the experience of His joy.

Think of it this way. When a man refuses to be a loving leader in his home, his home will not experience maximum joy. So men, are you exercising leadership in your home? Are you praying with your wife and children? Are you taking the spiritual lead by saying to your family, “Come on, it's the Lord's Day. We're going to church.”?

Men, God calls us to be the spiritual pacesetters in our homes. We are to say by words and example, “In this home we put Christ first.” When we fail to do that, we're abandoning our God-given role. And we're robbing God of glory and our families of joy.

The same occurs when a woman competes with her husband rather than seeking to complement him. When she withholds her encouragement from him, or when she usurps his authority by hiding things from him, or when she flat-out contradicts him by telling the kids, “Don't worry about your father. Just go ahead and do it. I said so.” When a wife does this, she's robbing God of His glory and her family of joy.

Parents and children can flip-flop roles, too. Parents, who's leading in your home, you or the kids? Does your home revolve around your children? Do their activities drive the family schedule? What happens when you're talking to your spouse and your child interrupts? Indeed, we're to love and nurture our children, and make sacrifices for them. But we're also to teach them that the world does not revolve around them.

Kids, how do you respond when your parents say *no*? Do you respect them? Teens, how do you react when your parents ask you questions, or give you counsel? Are you approachable and teachable, or do your defenses go up?

The embracing of roles is essential. It's not a question of worth. In Christ, we are equal. But in function, we are to live out our differing roles if we're going to please Christ. So let's look carefully at these God-given instructions.

Wives are to submit. To whom? Not to all men, but to their husbands. The verb is actually means “to place or rank under.” It's a military term. The fact that one soldier is a private and another a captain does not mean that one is better than the other. It does indicate that one is more responsible than the other.

Interestingly, in the broader sense of relationships in the church, there's to be a mutual submission. Ephesians 5:21 says, “Submitting to one another out of reverence for

Christ.” Sherry is my sister in Christ, and there’s a mutual submission in this relationship. We are to relate to each other humbly, giving honor to the other.

But the very next verse takes it a step further. Ephesians 5:22 says, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” So while there’s mutual submission, there’s another even more specific demonstration of Christlike submission.

God designed the wife to have a support role in her family. As we’ll see in a moment, He tells the husband to lead and holds the husband responsible for how He leads. He holds the wife responsible for how she responds to his leadership.

What’s to be a wife’s motivation as she embraces her role of support and encouragement? Colossians 3:18 concludes, “As is fitting in the Lord.” So her aim isn’t simply family harmony. It’s to please Christ.

It’s not, “Well, if I support him, things are more pleasant.” Which implies, if things aren’t more pleasant, I won’t do it. No. The goal is pleasing Christ, for the wife and the husband. She embraces this role because it is “fitting in the Lord.”

God gave one command to the wives, and two to the husbands.

B. Husbands are given two commands (19). “Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.”

1. *He is to love her.* “Husbands, love your wives.” Yes, you heard correctly. The Bible commands husbands to *love* their wives. The world says (in fact many Christians falsely say), “You can’t command love, for you can’t love someone if you don’t feel anything for them.”

But that’s not true. In fact, one of the reasons we struggle to love as we ought is because we let our feelings get in the way. No, biblical love is not a cold, dutiful sort of thing. Agape love involves warmth and emotion, but it’s the result, not the basis of it.

Love is primarily action. This is good news men. If you haven’t been loving your wife, you can *learn* to love her. Indeed, you *must*. And you can begin today.

The Greek term here is *agapao*. It’s choosing to do what’s right and in the best interest of the other person. It involves making sacrifices for the good of the other person. It is doing what God has done for us. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.”

In Ephesians 5, Paul elaborates by saying husbands are to love “as Christ loved the church (5:25).” How did Christ show He loved the church? He gave His life for it. That’s the standard, men. Love her as Christ loved His bride. Love her as you love your own body (Ephesians 5:28).

Wiersbe is right, “Headship is not dictatorship or lordship. It is loving leadership.” God commands a husband to love his wife. In the second command, He tells him what *not* to do.

2. *He is not to be bitter towards her.* “Do not be harsh with them,” says the NIV. Bitterness is the opposite of sweetness. A bitter husband will look on his wife as a servant and see her as an object to satisfy his petty whims.⁹ And bitterness can creep into a relationship slowly and ever so destructively.

But a God-fearing man won’t let it happen. He refuses to be sour or throw his weight around. Instead he works hard at knowing his wife’s needs (as 1 Peter 3:7 instructs) and meeting them. A supportive wife and a loving husband make a beautiful team.

You say, “What you’re saying is hard! I never saw this modeled growing up.”

I have good news for you, my friend. You don’t need a Christian background to make this work. But you do need Christ. The people who first received this letter didn’t

⁹ Observation by Robert Gromacki.

have a Christian model to look at. They were *first generation Christians*. But they could do it. This is why Paul commands these wives and husbands to live out these roles.

But how is it possible? Let me remind you of something very basic, and very essential. What chapter are we in? Colossians *three*, right? This isn't chapter one, or two, but three. Is that significant? Absolutely. We can't do chapter three until chapters one and two are a reality. What does that mean? It means we can't have a Christ-honoring family unless we first know Christ (which is what chapters one and two are all about) and living in light of that knowledge.

Now turn it around. If we know Christ, what can we do? We can honor Him by working to have the kind of family that pleases Him, and He'll give us the power to do just that.

You say, "*Work?* I have to *work* at this?" Yes! To borrow from Paul's language in Colossians 1:29, "To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me." It's a process, and it takes consistent effort in dependence upon Christ, but we can do this, even if we didn't see it growing up.

C. Children are to obey their parents (20). "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." Gromacki points out that the term "children" refers to those who are still dependent on their parents for their daily physical needs.¹⁰ What does God expect of such children? Paul uses one very simple word here.

Obey. The command is straightforward. If you are still dependent on your parents, your God-given role is to obey them, in two ways.

1. *Do it constantly and completely.* The word *hupakouete* literally means "to hear under." A child who obeys is one who first, puts himself under the authority of his parents, then listens to what they say, and then finally does what they say, without complaint or resistance.¹¹ Such obedience is to be rendered to "parents," the plural indicating both parents, and by extension, to those individuals to whom the parents delegate their authority (step-parents, grandparents, teachers, etc).

And it's to be "in everything," that is, unless God's higher authority would be violated.

2. *Do it to please the Lord.* Notice that phrase again, "for this pleases the Lord." The key to solid family relationships is remembering the Lord. We do what we do to please Him. In this case, He is pleased when a child renders consistent, Christlike obedience to his parents.

D. Fathers are told what *not* to do (21). "Fathers, do not provoke [NIV "do not embitter"] your children, lest they become discouraged." The term "fathers" refers to dads primarily, because they're most responsible (and perhaps most inclined to neglect this assignment). But this applies to both parents, for God has given the parenting role to both dads and moms.¹²

Paul specifies two things for fathers.

1. *Don't provoke your children.* Ephesians 6:4 uses a different word, warning that parents are not to "exasperate" their children. In Colossians, the word means "to excite" or "stimulate." Don't stir them up or provoke them is the idea.

We can do it in lots of ways. By criticizing them all the time. By humiliating them or making unreasonable demands. Another way is refusing to practice biblical discipline. Proverbs 13:24 says, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."

¹⁰ Gromacki, 149.

¹¹ Observation by Gromacki

¹² See the book of Proverbs for the vital and complementary roles of fathers and mothers.

God's way for dealing with problems is so good. It's not the silent treatment. It's not weeks of grounding. It's certainly not abuse. It's the use of firm, consistent, loving discipline. Proverbs 23:13-14 "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death."

Dads, what happens if you provoke or embitter our children? According to our text...

2. *If you do, you will dishearten them.* Have you seen any disheartened kids lately? I'll never forget the one I saw when I was in the seventh grade. I was visiting a friend's house who asked his dad if he could play on a baseball team that summer, only to hear this response, "Are you kidding? You're a quitter. You'll never amount to anything." Irritable parents produce discouraged children.

Parents, we have the power to put courage into a child's heart, or to take the heart right out of him. John Newton once said, "I know that my father loved me--but he did not seem to wish me to see it." That's tragic.

I read that Martin Luther's father was so stern to him that all his days Luther found it difficult to pray, "Our Father."¹³ To him the word *father* stood for nothing but severity. Luther himself said, "Spare the rod and spoil the child. It is true. But beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he does well."

So there it is. God gives us a vital general principle. We must put Christ first. And then He gives us guidelines. We please Christ when we embrace specific family roles. So let's ask ourselves an important question.

Make It Personal: Is our family functioning God's way?

Take a look at the list. What do you see? Probably some things that need attention. All of us have room to grow. So let me give you two practical exhortations.

1. *Take care of first things first.* Start here. Make sure you are *in Christ*. We can't do Colossians 3 until Colossians 1-2 are a reality. God sent His Son into the world, Jesus the Christ, to rescue sinners by dying on the cross in their place, and conquering the grave for their salvation. The Bible says that when a sinner repents of his sin and puts his faith in Jesus Christ, God (to use Colossians 1:13 language) rescues that sinner from the dominion of darkness and brings him or her into the kingdom of the Son He loves. Have you experienced this transfer? If not, call on Christ now and you will.

You say, "I have. I'm in Christ." Praise God! So answer this. Are you are putting Christ first. This is where the power comes from, and the joy, too. Resolve today to put Him number one in your life and family.

2. *Thank the Lord every day for grace.* We needed grace for salvation, and God gave it to us through Jesus Christ, the One who died in our place and then conquered death. But there's more. Through Christ we have grace for family living. It's ours for the asking. And for giving thanks.

Closing Song: #535 "A Christian Home" (all three verses)

Communion

Closing charge: Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

¹³ According to Barclay, 163