

## “Bringin’ It Home”

Colossians 3:18-21

This will be the last in the series on Colossians that we’re going to look at. There’s really only one more passage that I wanted to preach about and I’ll preach about it sometime in the future. On top of that I just wanted to end things on a non-controversial, smooth note for everybody.

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

If you ever wonder why I preach through books of the Bible, it’s because of passages like that. If I wasn’t committed to going through books of the Bible, I would probably skip that portion. It would be a lot easier on me later on this week, I guarantee you. I figured if we’re going to look at a controversial topic, I would to loosen the crowd up a little bit, sort of grease the skids.

I was thinking of some games that we play as a family. Whenever we have time (as the kids get older it’s harder), we try and have a family game night every now and then where we’ll play Pictionary or Balderdash or Imagine If. One of my favorites lately is a game called “Would You Rather.” The questions are so fun we just quit playing the game and sit around and ask each other these questions. The question will say, “Would you rather . . .” then it will give you two things that are completely different from each other, neither one of which are pleasant, more often than not. You have to make the case why you would want one unpleasant thing versus another unpleasant thing. Every now and then there’s a pleasant thing. I’m going to start with a pleasant one. For example, “Would you rather have your own personal live-in masseuse or your own personal live-in butler?” You don’t have to answer. They get a little more dicey. “Would you rather have freakishly over-developed muscles or be extremely skinny and wimpy?” How about this one? “Would you rather be caught outside in a severe hail storm or in a severe sand storm?” How about, “Would you rather wake up one day and not recognize your friends or family or not have your friends and family recognize you?” How about this one? “Would you rather have a scandal named after you or a disease named after you?” I lost some sleep over that one. Here’s one for wives. “If you’re a wife, would you rather submit to a man who loves you to the point of giving up everything or control a man who can’t stand you?” I’m not a woman. I don’t know if that would be a hard decision. How about this one for men? “If you’re a husband, would you rather your wife honor and respect you because she’s certain of your love and kindness or submit to you because she doesn’t have a choice?” Huh. There’s one here for kids. This is actually a real one; the last two weren’t. I’m sure you figured that out. Judy and I were doing this one night when this question came up and we were shocked at our children’s answer. The question is, “As children, would you rather have parents who are completely strict and unwavering or have parents who are completely lax and never paid any attention to you?” Do you know what they said? You’ll have to ask them.

I’m going to make the case that when you really begin to delve into texts like this, at the end of the day, they’re really not as controversial as you think, especially when you look at them through the lens of the Gospel. If you’re just reading through your Bible, it almost seems like this passage here where it says, “Wives submit . . .” pops out of nowhere. If you remember the book of Colossians, Paul has been telling them the Gospel. We think Epaphras asked Paul, “Would you write a letter to my church and tell us what we need to know?” Paul told them a couple of things. “First, you need to know who you are: that you’re alienated and separated from God in and of yourself and you have no hope of salvation. On the other hand, you need to know who Jesus is: that Jesus came and in Him and through Him and to Him all things were made and He reconciled all things to Himself through the blood of His cross. Once you get that, that you’re a sinner and, that Jesus saves sinners and you trust Him, then you can begin to think about living out the Gospel.”

In chapter 3 that’s what Paul started talking about. He said that we’re new creations, that we’re new in Jesus and because of that we need to put off certain behaviors and put on other behaviors. The last time we looked at Colossians, another non-controversial topic of “worship” came up and he gave a bigger picture of what it looks like to live out the Gospel in the context of the church. Then all of a sudden he starts talking about wives, husbands, and children. He starts talking about family.

We tend to think the issue of family is controversial today. The issue of family has been controversial since the advent of recorded history. People have almost never agreed on it. In fact, if you watch the news (I tend to be a night owl and I flip through the news), depending on which news channel you watch, you may get a different view of family. If I said, “You’ve got 10 hours to sit in front of the TV and flip through channels. At the end of it, I’m going to ask you what you think this

channel thinks about the family and what do you think that channel thinks about the family.” You might watch one of the news channels and hear all the commentators and pundits and they almost never mention the issue of family. Or if they did mention the issue of family they might say that the only way families are going to be in decent shape is if we first reform the government and take care of things from the top down and pass health care and all of these kinds of things. If you want healthy families you need to start from the outside in. The traditional family as we know it, relatively speaking, you might think is unimportant in the big picture of things. On the other hand, you might watch some pundits on a different channel. At the end of a few hours of watching, you might come away thinking that family is all important, that the only thing that matters is family. That if you want to reform society and want good health care and everything else, you need to start with the family. If you take care of the family and guard the family then in fact all of society will be better. That’s not true either. Neither one of those positions is true. Let me put it this way, both of those positions might be true to the people who said them but neither one of them is necessarily Biblical.

What does Christianity say about family? Christianity says, on one hand, the family is not unimportant, in fact it is rather important. On the other hand, the Gospel would say that the family is not all-important. Then what is the family? The family, according to the Bible, is not unimportant, it’s not all-important, but in fact the family is simply central. Let me put it a different way. The family unit, whether it’s the nuclear family as we know it or the nuclear family plus the extended family as they probably would have known it (including those who served them) is central to the Gospel because it’s almost like a lab. In other words, it’s like a preaching lab.

Some of you I know have actually been to seminary. The class everyone hated the most was preaching lab, at least where I went. Why? Because you sit through preaching class and listen to a guy say, “When you preach you need to preach like this . . . A, B, C, D, three points.” Then you go to preaching lab and write a sermon and you’re only preaching for your fellow students. Afterwards your fellow students get to critique you and the whole time you’re thinking, “You can’t preach any better than I can and you’re critiquing me?” Yet, they do it. But the rationale behind the preaching lab is that it’s a safe place. You preach in the preaching lab and there you make your mistakes. There you learn how to work things out before you’re actually exposed to the public and turned over to the churches. So, the family is much the same way. Paul has gone from sort of greater to more narrow. The family is central in that it is the place, much like a preaching lab, where you learn to preach, where you learn the Gospel. The family is not just the place where you learn the substance of the Gospel but it’s where you learn the outworking of the Gospel and where you fit in the greater family of God, in God’s greater household because remember that’s what He calls the church as well. Maybe bigger than that as I look at it, the family is maybe one of God’s greatest pictures of the Gospel to the world. When people look at a family they should in fact see the Gospel, at least in a family that calls themselves Christian.

We’re going to look at three things this morning. The first point is the submission of Jesus. The second thing we’re going to look at is the love of Jesus. And the third thing we’re going to look at is the obedience of Jesus. Let’s look first at the submission of Jesus. Let me read to you just verse 18. Paul says,

<sup>18</sup> *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (ESV)*

We tend to read this as modern people and think, “Man, this is sort of eye-popping. I can’t believe he just came right out and said that.” If it helps you feel any better, the original audience would have thought the same thing because it was not uncommon for ancient writers as they were talking about the family to tell wives to submit to their husbands. But they would never tell the wife. They would tell the husband, “Just make her do it.” That Paul is addressing wives at all is huge, and not just wives but also children and also slaves. By the very fact that he’s addressing them, he’s implying an equality. On the other hand, if you think about our culture you can see why when people hear that it would be offensive.

There are almost two ends of a continuum when you think of this verse and other ones like it. On one end of the continuum you have “Thelma and Louise.” On the other end of the continuum you have Ralph Kramden and “The Honeymooners.” “Thelma and Louise” is a movie about two women who were both being abused by men and they both decide they would rather die than submit to a man or be in submission to any kind of male leadership. The movie plays itself out that way. They go through the whole movie not submitting, hating men right to the very end to their death and they’re looked at as heroes. Now, on one hand there’s an error there. On the other hand, I can understand that. There have been some abused women in my family history. If you look at the U. S. Department of Justice statistics, at least (and these are just reported) 25% of women in the United States suffer some kind of abuse at the hand of a man. Twenty-five percent. That’s just what’s reported. If you go global and look at U. N. statistics, it’s at least one-third, probably much more, but that’s just what they know about. So, if 25% of women in the church and out of the church have suffered abuse, usually some kind of sexual abuse at the hands of men, you can understand a little bit where Thelma and Louise are coming from, can you not? It makes

sense. You should have some empathy. But the question is, “Because some submission is bad is all submission bad?” The answer is, of course, “No.” But the opposite error of Thelma and Louise is Ralph Kramden. If you’re under 50 or 60 or you haven’t been a TV rat like I have my whole life, he’s from “The Honeymooners.” Watch it on YouTube today if you’re under 40. You have Ralph Kramden and his wife, Alice, and he would often say to her when she would get a little bit uppity, “Alice, I’m the boss and you’re nothing.” Discussion over. It made life a lot simpler for him until she figured out that wasn’t the way things were supposed to be. That’s sort of how every episode played out. From that end of the continuum the issue is, “If some submission is good then all submission must be good.” That’s not true either.

There are a couple of clarifying points I want to make here just about this one verse where Paul says, “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.” First of all, what Paul is not saying is that every woman should submit to every man. He’s not saying that by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, there are places Biblically speaking where you can make the case where a man should submit to a woman. Even later on in this passage where he says, “Slaves obey your masters,” if a husband has passed away and the wife was in charge of the estate, the male slaves would have been responsible to be submissive to her. The best boss I ever had in the corporate world was a woman. I gladly submitted myself to her. She knew a lot more than I did. My sister, one of them, is a homicide detective and heaven help you if you do not submit to her when she tells you to freeze. I’m serious. So it can’t be that all women are submissive to all men. But neither can it be all wives to all husbands or all wives to every single thing a husband says. Those of you who are elders in the church and have been involved in church discipline often find out that abusive men will come in and say, “You need to tell my wife to come home and just take the abuse because the Bible says that she is supposed to submit.” That is a lie from the pit of hell. What they never do, in my experience, is quote the very next verse that says, “Husbands, love your wives.” However, there are lots of other places where if the husband is ordering a wife to do something that is wrong or is ungodly or unlawful or harmful, she is not to do it. She should seek help from her shepherds at the church. That’s what Paul is not saying. So, what is he saying then, positively speaking? First of all, when Paul says for wives to submit, notice he doesn’t say, “obey.” He doesn’t say, “Wives, obey your husband.” He says, “Wives, submit to your husband.” That word “submission” has to do with a voluntary putting yourself under their leadership. Voluntarily. Which is interesting because every other thing that Paul says here is not voluntary. It’s commanded. He says, “Submit yourselves to your husband because this is fitting in the Lord.”

Why would Paul say that? Why does that matter? Is it just because life is easier that way or because Paul is patriarchal? The answer, I think, is absolutely not. The answer is because if the home is a lab where the world gets to see the Gospel at work, one of the primary things you notice when you begin to look at the Gospel of Jesus is the submission of Jesus. What do I mean by the submission of Jesus? All of our creeds say that Jesus that “God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” Much like Paul would say that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, Gentile or non-Gentile, circumcised or un-circumcised, male or female, that men and women are completely and utterly equal as are Jesus and God the Father. Yet in order to secure our salvation, Jesus submitted Himself to the will of the Father. They’re the same in power, equal in substance and glory. That’s what theologians call the “Ontological Trinity.” There’s your word of the day. Ontological means sort of at base level. On the other hand, when Jesus Who is completely equal with God submits Himself to God, that’s what theologians call the “Economic Trinity,” or the economy of the Trinity. They all have a role even though they are equal. The reason Jesus submits Himself to the Father is that He might secure our salvation. God sent His only Son that He might give His life for us. Well, He couldn’t send Him unless the Son voluntarily submitted Himself to that. When a wife submits herself to a loving husband it is the picture of the Gospel.

Now let me say this. It seems like whenever controversial topics come up, or maybe it’s a smiling providence from God, I always have half the amount of time. But either way, if submission sounds to you like it would be hard or it would be onerous if you’re a woman sitting here, I want you to think that at least you don’t have it as bad as the men. What do I mean by that? The answer is just this: wives are to voluntarily submit to their husbands. Husbands, on the other hand, are commanded to love their wives. That’s another thing that makes Paul’s writing different than any of the ancient writers. If you look back as far as Aristotle and Pliny and all the Greeks, they all wrote about family relationships. They all said wives should be submissive to their husbands, they all said slaves should obey, they all said children should obey, but not one of them until the Apostle Paul said, “Husbands love your wives.” They might have said, “Husbands, keep your wives in line.” “Husbands, don’t let her open her mouth.” They might have said all kinds of things, but they never said, “Husbands love your wives.” That’s what makes it, I think, more difficult. On one hand you have submission. “I voluntarily put myself under your leadership.” On the other hand, you have love which goes all the way to the bottom. You have love which says, “I’m willing to give up everything for you. I’m willing to give up my rights.” Which would you rather do? Would you rather submit voluntarily to someone’s leadership or would you rather be ordered to give up 100% of your rights on behalf of someone else? That’s what love is.

If you want a picture of love, if you want a picture of what the husband's love is, all you have to do is read Hosea chapter 3. Do you remember the story of Hosea and Gomer? That's a difficult story for me to read at a number of levels. In that story God goes to the prophet Hosea and orders him to take a wife of adultery. He commands him, "Hosea I want you to take that woman right there, Gomer, as a wife and she is going to cheat on you. That's not a threat, that's a promise. And she's going to do it over and over and over again. Here's what I want you to do. When she cheats on you I want you to go get her. I want you to pursue her and love her and bring her back." So Hosea does it. I imagine he thought, "God can't be serious about that." What do you know? Gomer leaves. Hosea asks, "God, what do you want me to do?" "I told you what to do. Go after her. Get her." She does it again and again and again until finally, I can just imagine Hosea going back to God and saying, "God, I've had enough. She is not only gone but she's sold herself as a prostitute and she's on the auction block. So now to get her would actually cost me money. Now what do You want me to do?" What does God say? "Go get her." "But it's going to cost me money." "Yeah, you'd be surprised how much that kind of stuff can cost you." It's a Reader's Digest version, but you get the sense of him thinking, "Why would you ask me to do that over and over and over again?" The answer that comes back is what? "Because that's what I do for you, Hosea, over and over and over again." That's what Jesus does for you as well. We've drifted into point two: the love of Jesus.

Husbands are commanded to love their wives and what that means is living out the love that Jesus has for them. What Jesus does over and over and over again is chase after His wayward bride. I hate that model. Whenever I do weddings I say – it seems flippant – "Husbands, you're supposed to love your wives." How did Jesus do that? He did it as prophet and priest and king. I'm okay with the prophet and king part because the prophet is supposed to bring God's Word to his sheep and his family, and the king is supposed to provide and protect. I can do both of those things. But what the priest does is constantly mediating, and constantly pursues even when he is the offended party. Husband, if your wife has offended you, it is your responsibility to pursue reconciliation. Husbands, if you have offended your wife it is your responsibility to pursue reconciliation. Do you see how I could hate that? You never get the picture of Jesus coming home, plopping down on his La-Z-boy and saying, "You know what, when she gets her act together and she wants to come talk to me about all the stuff she's done wrong to offend me, then I'm just sitting here waiting." Of course then when she comes to talk: "Hey, psst!" [holding his hand up as if to block the interruption while he's watching TV then pausing the program]. "Okay, what were you saying?" You never get the idea that Jesus comes home late from work and expects to have a certain this or that for dinner and when it's not made gets completely outraged and says, "You know if this woman really cared about me she'd make what I like. She would have read my mind as I was driving home, changed her plans, and made what I want. But she doesn't. Because of that I'm going to go in the living room and pout, and when you're ready to come be reconciled, you come find me, honey. I love you." That's not what the Gospel demands. What the Gospel demands here (of every Christian, by the way) is what you see on the Sermon on the Mount. "If your brother has something against you, go pursue them." But specifically, in the context of the family, the wife gets to be like Jesus in that she submits herself to the leadership of her husband. The husband gets to be like Jesus in that he loves his wife, and I don't just mean romantically, I mean he pursues her all the way to the bottom. That's hard. So you see the submission of Jesus, the love of Jesus, and the obedience of Jesus in the family. You see it with children. What does Paul say to them?

<sup>20</sup> *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.* <sup>21</sup> *Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.* (ESV)

Much like wives, children, if your parents tell you to do something that is wrong or unlawful, you shouldn't do it. You should ask for help. But inasmuch as what they're saying is what is right and true, you need to obey them. The reason you need to obey them is not because God will love you more if you do. It's pleasing, but why is it pleasing to God when you do that? Because when children obey their parents in the Lord it is a picture to the world of the Gospel. It is a picture of the complete obedience that Jesus the Son has to God the Father. Remember, the book of Philippians says that Jesus was obedient even to death on a cross [Philippians 2:8]. You see, it's the obedience of Jesus that even enables us to be obedient. If Jesus was not obedient, you and I wouldn't even stand a chance. That's for children or parents. The question is, "Will you trust the obedience of Jesus on your behalf or will you try to gut it out yourself?" If you knew that you were alienated and separated from God, would you rather receive a free gift of grace from someone's who has already done all the work on your behalf, knowing that if you do He promises that He will never fail or forsake you and He will never kick you out of the house. Would you rather have that or would you rather gut it out yourself and see what happens at the end? Think about it.