

Christ-Sufficient Families

Colossians 3:18-21 *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.* ¹⁹ *Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.* ²⁰ *Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.* ²¹ *Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*

Certain plants are very difficult to grow. If you don't give them the right amount of water, the right amount of sunlight, the right air temperature – they either die or won't bear fruit. So when people want these plants to grow, they create an environment that is almost ideal. They put them in a greenhouse or a laboratory. There, they control the air temperature – not too hot and not too cold. They control the exact amounts of water. They control the humidity in the air. They control the exposure to light. In the end, they try to produce the most favourable environment for the plants to grow.

When God wants people to develop into being Christlike, God-loving, spiritually healthy individuals, He has a laboratory. His laboratory is called *the home*. His laboratory is *the family*. But, just as with the laboratory or greenhouse for plants, to produce the ideal results, a number of factors must be in place. When each one plays its part, the end result is a Christ-centred, Christ-honouring home.

The ingredients of a home are wives, husbands, children and parents. And just as the ingredients of water, humidity, air temperature, must be present in particular ways for plants to grow, so these role players must be present in a family in particular ways for the final mix to be conducive to what God wants.

A family built upon Christ and His sufficiency has wives who submit, husbands who love, children who obey and parents who encourage. Now that is not *all* those members do: wives also love, husbands also lead, children also love and serve, parents also instruct and correct – but the emphasis here is on what often goes wrong in families. What most often goes wrong is that wives do not submit, husbands do not love, children do not obey and parents provoke and discourage their children.

Instead of taking them one at a time and giving a different teaching for each of them, I'm going to view them as a whole.

Now your family might even lack one of these ingredients. Nevertheless, you can apply the Scriptures as best you can, and trust God to bring something beautiful out of the laboratory of your family.

What Colossians shows us is what happens when each member of the family believes in, and practises the sufficiency of Christ.

I. Wives That Submit

Why does he start with the wives? Possibly because of all the commands, this is the one most likely to be attacked. People are fine with husbands loving, children obeying and parents encouraging. But it is the idea of wives submitting that people have a problem with.

But in fact, this word for *submit* is used for other situations too. It is used for how we should respond to government in Romans 13:1. It is used for how Jesus responded to His parents in Luke 2:51. It is used in Romans 8:7 for how the heart is supposed to respond to God's commands. In other words, submission is not something limited to wives. All of us have to do it in various spheres.

Submission is not inferiority. I Corinthians 11 says that Christ submits to the Father, and yet Christ and the Father are equal. We know that Galatians 3:28 tells us that male and female are one in Christ.

Submission is following your husband's leadership in all things except sin. God has appointed the husband to be the head of the wife and of his home.

Ephesians 5:23-24 *For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. ²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*

Now the thing about submission is that it kicks in at the point of disagreement. When you both want to go west, you don't notice submission, because his will is the same as your will. But it is at the point of disagreement that submission really kicks in. You want to go west, and he wants to go east. Now, in a loving family you will discuss the matter. You might disagree. But if after discussing it, and making appeals, your husband wants to go east, which way does the Lord require you to go? He wants you to go east.

And does he want you to go east, muttering under your breath, kicking the stones as you go, complaining about the decision, making the trip difficult? No, God wants submission from the heart.

Now, how can one submit like that? The good news is that submission is ultimately submission to Christ. Notice the words “*as is fitting in the Lord*”.

To whom are you ultimately submitting? You are submitting to Christ, because He has commanded you. Now submitting to a man can be hard. Submitting to the mistaken decision of a man can be frustrating. But you are not merely doing that. You are submitting to the all-sufficient Christ, who says, “This is my pattern – trust me, I will work it out for good - even the mistakes.” The only thing you could not submit to Christ in – would be sin, for sin is contrary to Christ Himself.

When you submit to Christ, through your husband, you are able to submit consistently, and even cheerfully, because the supreme, all-sufficient Christ is in view, not your imperfect husband.

A wife who is settled on, and dwelling on, the sufficiency of Christ is free. She can joyfully submit, regardless of her husband, because her obedience to Jesus is not conditional upon his.

The Bible says, ‘*when a wife does this – it is fitting.*’ It has the idea in the original language of a wall built to the correct height. In God's sight – a wife's submission is appropriate, right, beautiful.

II. Husbands That Love

Husbands are commanded to love. Ephesians tells us the measure in which you must love your wife:

Ephesians 5:25 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,*

The word for 'give' is a word which was used for a judge who would hand someone over for punishment. Jesus handed himself over for the church. How should a husband love his wife? He should be willing to hand himself over – die to self, and love sacrificially.

This is the love of sacrifice, the love of brave and selfless sacrifice, so as to serve. The Lord Jesus was not a general who watched the battle from the safety of his tent. The Lord Jesus rode into battle against sin and death and Satan at the front of the line – sacrificing Himself for His bride.

Now this takes a lot. In fact, I would say it takes more than even submission from the wife. How are husbands to accomplish this?

If the wife is to submit to you, not for your sake, but for Christ's, guess why you are to love her?

You are to love her for Christ's sake. Love as Christ loved. Forgive as Christ forgave. Your aim in loving your wife, is loving Christ. He has commanded you to do this; loving her is part of your love for Him.

Because let's face it, just as husbands can be hard to submit to in themselves, so wives can be hard to love, in themselves. But that's the point. Your love for your wife is not meant to be simply a love for her, for herself. In fact, if you love your wife for herself, and her alone, and for no other reason – do you know what the Bible calls that? The Bible calls it Idolatry. You would be loving her as if she were the end of all your actions – your ultimate love. But God is to be your ultimate love. Loving your wife is one of the ways you love Him.

But when you love your wife for the sake of the perfect, all-sufficient Christ, you can find the motive and means to love her, even when the things that drew you to her originally are not the same. If a wife thinks your love for her is dependent on her looks, or her cooking, or her work, or her parenting – she might feel very unstable – because those things change. But if she knows – my husband will love me, in spite of me, because He loves Christ – there's security.

Husbands, your task is to show your wife something of Christ's relationship to His people. In fact, the way you treat your wife might well be the biggest lesson your children learn about how Christ loves the church. It is a huge task.

And there is a negative command placed here – *do not be bitter with them*.

Do not become sour, bitter, which by implication makes you sharp, cutting and harsh.

Someone said, don't call her 'honey' and treat her like vinegar. The verb here is passive. Do not allow yourself to become embittered. Do not let bitterness and sourness enter your heart regarding your wife.

If something about your wife is causing resentment, decide if it is something in your heart which you need to deal with, or if it is something in her life that needs to change. If it is in your heart, make the changes. If it is in her life, choose the right time to help her put it right. But don't stay at work till 11 pm to avoid your wife. Do not bury yourself in your job or your hobby or your television because you have come to prefer those things over her.

Be the leader, if things have become sour; step in to change the taste.

The fact is, Ephesians 5 tells us to hate your wife is to hate yourself, because you are one. So, you might not realise it, but the sourness and bitterness you allow in your heart towards her, poisons your own life.

Ecclesiastes 9:9 *Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.*

III. Children Who Obey

Children, the Bible says, *'Obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.'*

When it is raining what do you use? You use an umbrella. The umbrella protects you from getting

wet. If it is raining all around you, and you have an umbrella, where is the one place you can stand and not get wet? You can stand under the umbrella! As long as you are under the umbrella, and the umbrella is over you – you will be protected from the rain.

Do you know that your parents are like an umbrella? Not to protect you from the rain, but to protect you from many things that can harm you - sin, Satan, the world. There are many things in the world that can hurt you, and some of them are found inside your own heart.

When your parents tell you to do something, and you listen to them, God says – ‘You are standing under the umbrella. You are protected. It will be well with you.’

Now, if you do not listen to your parents, you are like someone who steps outside of the umbrella when it is raining. They are going to get wet. In the same way, when you don't listen and obey your parents, you are stepping away from God's protection, and you are going to get hurt.

Now when it rains, does it rain just on the tree, or on the roof of only one house? No, it rains everywhere. So, when it is raining all around me, where must I use my umbrella? I must use it everywhere. That is why the Bible says, 'obey your parents in all things'. Not just when you feel like it. Not just when you agree with them. Not just when you want to. Not just when it makes sense to you. Obey in all things. When it is raining, you stay under the umbrella all the time. You must obey all the time, immediately and cheerfully.

One day you will grow up, and leave your mom and dad. On that day, you won't be under their umbrella; but until then, God says, obey them in all things.

Now, here is a bigger umbrella. If your parents are the smaller umbrella – who do you think the big umbrella represents? It represents God. Do you know that your parents are also under an umbrella? They must also obey God. And God tells them to teach you and train you. So when you step away from the small umbrella – do you know who else you are stepping away from? You are stepping away from God.

God wants you to learn to listen and obey Him. The way you learn to listen to Him is by listening first to your parents. When you do, the Bible says God is pleased. God loves to see children that obey their parents, because they are learning to obey Him. God doesn't want to see you get hurt by sin and evil. So God says – stay under the umbrella I gave you. I gave you mom and dad – listen to them in all things.

IV. Parents that Encourage

Now the command is given to fathers. This is not because mothers are excluded, but because fathers are supposed to represent the parenting team. So God addresses the father as the spiritual leader of the home, but indirectly addressing the mother as well.

The command here is negative. Do not provoke your children, lest they be discouraged.

The word for provoke means to stir them up, to irritate, anger and annoy to the point that the child loses heart - their spirit is broken; they have lost motivation to keep trying to obey. They are disheartened.

It is a real danger that parents can go about parenting to where the children are so filled with resentment, anger or discouragement that they turn away from the Lord. To avoid that situation, the Bible says, father don't provoke them.

What does that mean?

It doesn't mean that you are not supposed to correct them. **Ephesians 6:4** says ‘*bring them up in the*

The Bible is not saying, 'avoid displeasing your child'. The process of instruction means confronting their sinful nature head-on, which means there will be much displeasure. There will be tantrums, shouts, crying and so forth, if you do your job at shepherding a child's heart away from selfishness and towards obedience.

Godly discipline is not what is in view here. What the Bible is warning against is acting towards your children in ways that exasperate them, wear them out and leave them without hope.

What are some of the ways this might happen?

1. When you require of the children what they cannot do. To require a two year old to sit next to my desk for four hours while I work would be unfair. He can't do that. He can sit in church for an hour – that's not expecting too much. Don't underestimate your child's ability. But don't overestimate it either.
2. When you keep changing your standards. The Lord does not tell us that lying is forbidden today, and then tomorrow change His mind and allow it. He does not discipline us for idolatry on one day, and then indulge us on the next. God is fair, He is faithful and unchanging. Children thrive on consistency. If the rule is no biscuits before supper, you will provoke them to anger if you allow it on Tuesday and spank them on Wednesday for eating biscuits before supper. You will discourage them if you let their room be messy for week after week, and finally explode and demand they clean it up. If you wanted it clean, then communicate that standard consistently. Don't chop and change; permit and then try to make up for your permissiveness with sudden over-correction. It will discourage.
3. When you don't practise what you preach. Nothing makes the people you lead more upset than the thought that you do not do the things you command them to do. When children become a little older, they begin to realise – Mom and Dad tell me to live this way, but Dad doesn't obey God in those areas. Mom's attitude doesn't please God. Mom and Dad insist I obey God and punish me if I don't, but they get away with disobeying God in their own ways and no one stops them. And the child grows angry, discouraged, bitter, and hostile. If you sin, admit it and apologise. Ask your children for forgiveness where appropriate. Children forgive a lot easier than adults. They become bitter only when you keep excusing and ignoring your disobedience and insisting that they obey you.
4. When you overprotect; when you try to take the place of God in their lives, trying to control every situation, mollicoddling them, it becomes like a noose around their neck. It leads to rebellion.
5. When you show favouritism. Remember how Jacob treated Joseph? Remember how his brothers felt about him? There is nothing like favouritism to build up resentment in your children.
6. When you humiliate them or treat them with unkindness. It is sad to say, but some people aren't big or brave enough to bully other adults, so they bully their children. Some parents are bullies. They humiliate their children with names "stupid" "clumsy" "pain" "pest" "ugly". They compare them unfairly - "Why can't you be like your sister?" "You're always messing things up?" "Will you never learn to do it properly?" Mocking them when they fail - "You silly clutz!" Some parents are even physically rough, taking their frustration out with harsh treatment. Physical correction can only be administered when you are cool, calm and collected. Christian parents need to realise that their children will not be children in heaven. You will be equals with them – brothers and sisters. When you speak to them, realise, this child will one day be my equal for all eternity. Your current intellectual, emotional and physical advantages must not be used to humiliate or bully them.

7. When we do not encourage them. God does not only tell us what not to do or what to do. He has filled His Word with promises, with privileges, with rewards, with blessings. God encourages His children, doesn't He? In fact, the Christian life is hard enough, that if we did not have encouragement, we might lose heart. Children are going through all kinds of changes, and making a lot of mistakes. A lot of the time, there is correction going on. So, you had better build up a big memory bank of happy, comforting, encouraging times. There must be fun times. There must be love openly expressed. We should praise them when they do right. We should comfort them when they make honest mistakes. A child should feel that his parents are the first people he wants to talk to when in need.

1 Thessalonians 2:11 *as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, ¹² that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

Don't exasperate them. Be a fair, consistent, genuine, kind and encouraging parent who points them to Christ through your own behaviour.

If Christ is sufficient for us, we will display that. Husbands can love wives for Christ's sake. Wives can submit for Christ's sake. Children can obey for Christ's sake. Parents can nurture and admonish for Christ's sake.