

Title: *Getting Along in Family*

Text: Colossians 3:18-4:1

One of the most difficult places to live out our Christian faith is in our family. Maybe you're a fired up believer but your family isn't. It's difficult not to be able to share that deepest part of yourself in any meaningful way with those you love the most. They may also be the ones who are the most ready to pounce when you slip up and do something that's not a good witness.

I read about one family that seems typical to the way that much of family life is in 2012.

The Ledbetter family likes to spend time at home together — just not always in the same room. So they built a 3,600-square-foot house with special rooms for studying and sewing, separate sitting areas for each child, and a master bedroom far from both. Then there's the escape room, where Mr. Ledbetter says, "Any family member can go to get away from the rest of us."

The Mercer Island, Washington, industrial designer says his 7- and 11-year-old daughters fight less, because their new house gives them so many ways to avoid each other. "It just doesn't make sense for us to do everything together all the time," he says.

After two decades of pushing the open floor plan—where domestic life revolved around a big central space and exposed kitchens gave everyone a view of half the house—major builders and top architects are walling people off. They're touting one-person Internet alcoves, locked-door away rooms, and his-and-her offices on opposite ends of the house. The new floor plans offer so much seclusion, they're "good for the dysfunctional family," says Gopal Ahluwalia, director of research for the National Association of Home Builders.

The approach isn't for all architects. William Sherman, chairman of the department of architecture and landscape architecture at the University of Virginia, says all the cut-up spaces make families more isolated and lonelier than ever. "People don't even gather in the same spot to watch TV anymore," Mr. Sherman says. "It's sad."

Let's set aside his assertion that the main way to spend family time together is by watching TV for a moment and you have a picture of lonely, isolated people living lonely, isolated lives.

There was one scene in the movie *Courageous* that seemed typical. The Mitchell family was in their grief over the tragic loss of their little girl. The son was begging for his father's attention, which for him meant running a Father-Son 5K together.

Mom and Dad were in one room of the house while the 15-year old son was in his room with the door locked, with headphones on, playing video games. That's not to say that there's anything wrong with that. It just struck me how easy it is for family members to isolate themselves from each other, even at those times that they desperately need each other.

Even with dysfunctionality, fragmentation, and isolation in today's families, I believe one of the most effective witnesses we can have nowadays is through our families and the quality of our home life together.

We may fuss and fume about our family. If we're young, we may say, "I can't wait for

the day that I'm able to move out." If your nest is not yet empty, you may be looking at the calendar and saying May 2028 – which, Lord willing is the month that Christopher will graduate from college. That sounds so far off.

Every family has their flaws and weakness and their own dysfunction, but when someone from a home that is broken and fragmented gets a taste of a family that has it reasonably together, it functions like the salt of the gospel to make them thirsty for what they know they need.

Family life in the ancient world was a lot more open and there was a lot less privacy. A household would include the *paterfamilias*, or the head of the family, children, their spouses, children and household servants. There was a strict pecking order and code and a specific way of viewing the family. Family and marriage was considered to be somewhat of a business or a practical arrangement. If love happened along the way, that was an added bonus, but that was not really expected. We can understand why a student once said that Socrates died from an overdose of wedlock.

Paul is trying to write into his cultural context, but we often read these words through our cultural context and those with feminist leanings get mad respond with indignation to that word *submit*. I believe the Bible teaches mutual submission. I read one commentator who was adamant that the Bible teaches mutual submission, but I don't agree with him. In Ephesians, in a similar way, Paul talks about life in the Spirit. He says,

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.”

What's interesting here is that in the original Greek, in verse 21 where it says, “Wives, submit . . .” that word submit isn't there. It is in verse 20 where Paul says, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, wives to your own husbands.” So as Paul has told everyone to submit to one another, he uses the image of wives and husbands as the first example of what submission entails and is to look like.

It's interesting, J. B. Phillips translates Ephesians 5 passage, “And ‘fit in with’ each other, because of your common reverence for Christ.” In the Colossians passage, he translates the same word, “Wives, adapt yourselves to your husbands, that your marriage may be a Christian unity.”

I have to admit, I've preached the Ephesian passage and worked it out to where I'm comfortable with the idea of mutual submission and I'm confident in standing up and saying that Paul teaches mutual submission. The first time I had any idea that Allyson might be interested in me was after I preached on Ephesians 5 and talked about the idea of mutual submission and how the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. It would be interesting to ask Phillips

why he used the phrase “fit in with” each other in one place and the words “adapt yourselves to your husbands” in another place.

Some women hear that word submit and have a violent reaction to it. “I’m not some timid little door mouse of a woman who is going to sit around and wait for my husband to tell me what to do.” “I’m don’t want to feel as if I have to get his permission before I cross the street!” “I’m better with money than he is and I’m supposed to submit to his crazy, out-of-control, spendthrift ways?”

That is not at all what is taught here. It may seem like a perverse kind of logic, like really twisting and doing contortions, but in a way, Paul is even elevating the status of women by addressing them as ethically responsible, moral partners. To tell them that they have a way in which they were supposed to act, lets them know that in God’s eyes, they are not just their husband’s property.

David Garland gives several examples of what submission isn’t and what it is. A lack of submission will manifest itself in a lack of consideration for the other, indifference to the other’s needs, haughtiness, self-aggrandizement or using the other to get your way (becoming very manipulative), and living in the present and promising no future commitment. That’s what I think is one of the insidious things about just living together. If you’re as committed to each other as you say you are, why won’t you go ahead and make it legal, moral and official and get married? The only reason I can think of is, somewhere deep inside of me, I want an easy out.

Submission, on the other hand, is committing your entire life and all its possibilities to someone else, wanting **their** good and not just wanting them to meet your needs, being concerned for their ultimate well-being without trying to control them or expecting to be treated like a hero for making sacrifices, accepting all the demands of the relationship and not tallying up to see when I’ve done enough, accepting responsibility for the other person and accepting his or her problems as our problems, and just simply listening.

Warren Wiersbe says, “Submission is not subjugation. Subjugation turns a person into a thing, destroys individuality, and removes all liberty. Submission makes a person become more of what God wants him to be; it brings out individuality; it gives him the freedom to accomplish all that God has for his life and ministry. Subjugation is weakness; it is the refuge of those who are afraid of maturity. Submission is strength; it is the first step toward true maturity and ministry.

In every successful, happy, long-term marriage that I’ve ever been able to observe, there has been a pattern of give and take, working things out, what we would call mutual submission. Even the most traditional, sweet-spirited grandma type that you can think of would likely have a pretty strong reaction if you told them submission means that when your husband says, “Jump,” you’re supposed to ask, “How high?”

As someone has said, “It seems to me that the wives have the easier part of the agreement as Paul lays it out here. Wives are told to accommodate themselves or to “fit in with” their spouses. Husbands are told to love their wives as Christ loves the church. In Ephesians, Paul

says, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

In Colossians, Paul isn't quite as theological. He simply says, "Husbands, love your wives and don't be harsh with them." Marriage in the ancient world was viewed simply as an accord to produce legitimate heirs. One ancient writer said, "Since women are married for the sake of bearing children and heirs, and not for pleasure and enjoyment, it is totally absurd to inquire about the quality or rank of the family line or about the abundance of their wealth, but not to inquire about their ability to conceive children." Sounds like little more than a business arrangement or an arrangement of convenience to me.

Another writer says, "Love in marriage was a stroke of good fortune; it was not the basis of the institution." So into this world where a wife was viewed essentially as a slave or as property, Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says wives, you're not just a piece of property and you are not your husband's slave, but what God intends as a model of what a loving family should be and as a witness to a world that is watching to see if there's any reality to this Christian thing, fit in with, adapt yourselves to your husband and cooperate with each other and make this thing work. Husbands, I don't want you to be harsh with your wives or to treat her like she's just a slave or a baby making machine. Love her. Treat her with honor and dignity and respect. Scripture even refers to women as the weaker vessel. Treat her with compassion and love.

I really like what one Bible scholar writes when he says, "If a wife is asked to submit, it is to the husband's *love* not to his tyranny." When I think of the negative example of submission, I think of the way Archie Bunker used to treat Edith. On one episode of *All in the Family*, Gloria had had enough of Archie's domination of Edith and her weak, willing submission to him and she said, "Don't you see what she's doing? She's bowing to him. She's catering to him. She's serving her lord and her master." Archie replied, "Ain't that a nice way of putting it?"

Husbands, do you want a wife who is afraid of you and cowers before you like a slave, or do you want a wife who responds to you with deep respect and a desire to serve you in the healthiest sense of that word because she knows that you love her and you are committed to her?

I don't have as much of a problem adapting myself to, as I do loving as Christ loved the church and saying no matter what, I would lay down my life for you and I am laying my life down for you every day as I place your interests above my own.

Now children are told to obey their parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Invariably when this topic comes up, someone will ask, "What if you have evil parents who are asking their kids to partake in evil?" The Ephesians passage makes that a little bit easier to answer because it says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.² "Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise --³ "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." If the admonition is something that is done "in the Lord" you know that the exhortation is not toward evil. The thought for children is

that loving parents have their best interests at heart and really do want what's in their best interest. If children will acknowledge that and respect their parents' authority, it will go better for them.

We're learning on Sunday afternoons about verse 21, "Fathers, don't exasperate your children. We do that through unfair comparisons – why can't you be more like your brother? Have you ever wondered what it must have been like for Jesus' siblings? Why can't you be more like Jesus?"

We also do it through unrealistic expectations. When I gave Jonathan his first driving lesson, I realized that there a lot of lessons I've learned about driving in the 35 years that I've been driving that are ingrained in me and are now reflexive and second nature. What I take for granted, Jonathan doesn't have. And, obviously, I'm still alive. I could really exasperate him if I nit-picked him to death because his driving is not yet up to my expectations. He's only had one lesson, for cryin' out loud.

You could also say that they are exasperated through unmet needs. Attention. Time. Interest. Do you ever fight the tendency to tune your child out when they're telling you about something that they're excited about, but you don't share their enthusiasm? In our *Honor Begins at Home* class, someone shared that their adult brothers were resentful of the fact that their father – a pastor – never seemed to be home because he was always out trying to save the world.

Masters slaves. Do everything you do as unto the Lord

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