

Colossians 3:15-21 "A Father's Day Charge: Putting Christ on Display in Your Family" \*\*

Main Idea: God's intent for our families is to put Christ on display for all to see. Colossians 3:15-21 shows us in practical terms how to fulfill that purpose, by laying before us a general principle and then some specific guidelines.

I. General principle: We need to 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).
  - 1. Will it bring honor to Christ?
  - 2. Can I thank God while I am doing it?

II. Specific guidelines: We please Christ by fulfilling our family roles (18-21).

- A. Wives are to submit to their husbands (18).
  - 1. Differing roles are not bad.
  - 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.
- C. Children are to obey their parents (20).
  - 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 them.
  - 2. If you do, you will dishearten them.

Response: What's needed in your home?

- 1. Take care of first things first.
- 2. Thank the Lord for grace.

What's the purpose of your family? One of the challenges we must address as families is our busy-ness, and one of the dangers of our busy-ness is that we lose sight of our purpose. We're running to work, to ballgames, to the grocery store, to music lessons, to family reunions, to church, to community events, and so on, and then it hits us. Why are we doing what we are doing?

Well, today is Father's Day, and as such it's a great day to affirm the wonderful purpose God has established for our families. Simply put, God's intent for your family and mine is to *put Christ on display for all to see*.

But how does it happen? In practical terms, how does a family put Christ on display? We're going to find out this morning. Colossians 3:15-21 shows us how to fulfill our God-given purpose by laying before us a general principle and then some specific guidelines.

God, of course, designed the family. Since He did, He knows how it's to function, and He graciously gave us a "Family Manual," the Bible, so we would know how it's to function. And one of the subjects concerning which He gives very specific instruction is the subject of *family roles*.

According to Colossians 3:15-21, when it comes to family roles, we need to take heed to two types of God-given instruction. First, there's a general principle, and then there are specific guidelines that build on that principle.

### I. General principle: We need to put Christ first (15-17).

Perhaps it goes without saying that Christ deserves to be first. The message of Colossians is that Christ is the preeminent One (1:18). The first two chapters of Colossians put the spotlight on His supremacy, sufficiency, and superiority. Yet even though He is supreme, Christ came to earth to rescue us from our sins. He "made peace through His blood shed on the cross" (1:20). When we were alienated from God, we were reconciled to God through Christ's death (1:22). When we were dead in our sins, God "made us alive with Christ" and "forgave us all our sins" (2:13).

So, yes, for these a thousand other reasons, Christ has a right to be first in our lives! The question becomes, *how does that happen?*

In chapters 3 and 4 Paul shows us how to put Him first in practical terms. 3:1 "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 you need to 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 "put on" some things. But the key to it all, as we'll see in the text before us (15-17) is the *Word*.

Perhaps you're thinking, "Okay, give it to me straight. I'm a Christian, but how do I put Christ first in my life?" The answer is this isn't something you can do *alone*. The instructions that Paul gives in chapter three are to "you" *plural*. Christ didn't save you to be an island. He saved you intending for you to function in a Body, His Body. And in order to put Him first, you must make three choices that involve your relationships with the rest of His people. Here's the first...

**A. Let the peace of Christ rule in you (15).** Again, as you listen to verse 15, keep in mind the "you" is plural: "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?" Though the KJV has "peace of God," the actual reading is *Christ* who obviously is God. Christ is our peace (Eph. 2:14). He is also the source of peace. He's the One who took away the enmity that separated us from God, and He did it at the cost of His own life 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 this verse is mistakenly used as a subjective guide to decision-making: "If you want to know the will of God, wait until He gives you His peace." But I would suggest that this verse isn't talking about *inner* peace, but *interpersonal* peace, as the second part indicates. 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—we call them "umpires"—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 in our families. We're supposed 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.

Please don't miss this phrase in verse 15. We were "called to peace." It's part of our reason for existence. Our relationships as Christians are supposed to be showcases for the peace of Christ.

So answer this. How is it in your home? Are you letting the peace of Christ rule in your relationships? Do you see peace or turmoil in your family?

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 praise from our lips. If Christ's peace rules in us, we'll be thankful.

Are you enjoying peaceful relationships? If you are, don't take it for granted. Thank the One responsible. And reaffirm your commitment to allow the peace of Christ to rule in you.

Putting Christ first involves a second choice.

**B. Let the word of Christ dwell in you (16).** "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

The text begins with this imperative, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you." What's the "word of Christ?" Here it could refer either to the word spoken *by* Christ or the word spoken *about* Christ. In either case, it still points to the revealed word (H. M. Carson, 90).

What are we supposed to do with the 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 (Gromacki, 143).

And both are necessary. We must be *in the Word* in order for the Word to be *in us*.

You say, "How can we tell if the Word is dwelling in us?" Paul says that if we are, there will be evidence of it. It will show up. How? In the following segment of the verse, Paul specifies two primary responsibilities. That is, if the Word of Christ is dwelling in us, we're to do two things with that Word.

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. The ministry of the Word tells people 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 sense of this text. 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 body. They go hand in hand.

We want to be known in this community as a place where the Word dwells. People should be able to

say of us, "If you want to find biblical answers 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 you hope. The Word is at home there."

To be that kind of church, each of us individually must prioritize being in the Word. We must value learning and teaching the Word.

I'm concerned about what's happening in many so-called "Bible believing" churches these days. Warren Wiersbe is right (140), "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."

If the Word is dwelling in us, we're to teach it to one another. A second responsibility.

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

Did you catch that? If the Word is dwelling in us, we will sing. There's a connection between learning God's Word and singing. It's interesting that from the beginning the Church was a *singing* church (Barclay, 159).

What are we to sing? Three things. *Psalms*--Old Testament psalms. The Jews had sung them for centuries, and apparently so did the early church. *Hymns*--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*--possibly songs used in the church that recounted the acts of God and praised Him for them.

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

Do you sing in church? "No, I don't sound good." Hold on. Says who? In His Word, God says He wants us to sing. He's pleased when we sing, when we join our voices together and sing *to Him*.

So there are two evidences that the Word of Christ is in us--we'll teach it to one another and we'll sing it to God. Are you doing those? Are you doing them in your family? Do you talk about the Bible together? Do you sing God's praises together?

By the way, Ephesians 5:18 is a parallel passage. There Paul commands us to be "filled with the Holy Spirit." But here in Colossians 3 we're to be let the Word dwell in us. Which is it, the Spirit or the Word? They're interrelated. If you want to enjoy the fullness of the Spirit, you must be filled with the word of Christ. If you want to experience the Spirit, the means is the Word which the Spirit produced.

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

**C. Let the name of Christ influence all you do and say (17).** "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Verse 17 is a "catch-all" verse--*whatever you do*. That's pretty inclusive, isn't it?

But Paul doesn't stop there. He elaborates, "whether in word or deed." Your words--that's what you say. Your deeds--that's what you do. Put them together and you've got the totality of your life.

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

What does that mean? Names don't mean much to us other than being identification tags. But in Bible times a name meant so much more. And the name of Christ represents all that He is and all that He accomplished. It's connected to His authority.

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 a bill into a law.

Beloved, we bear the name "Christian." The term appears only three times in the Bible. That name is a reminder that we belong to Christ. His name has been stamped upon us. Realize this. It is a serious thing to call yourself a "Christian."

Simply put, before we ever 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--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 wife or daughters, I must ask, "Will it bring honor to Christ?" And second question...

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

And if you'll recall that Paul was a Roman prisoner when he wrote this, you'll see he practiced what he preached. It's easy to be thankful for some things. But we're to give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thes. 5:18). What makes that possible? This. We let the name of Christ influence everything we say and do.

Our goal isn't an easy life. It's to glorify the name of Christ. And if He deems suffering necessary, we can give thanks to the Father through Him.

So here's where we start, with this general principle: Put Christ first. Have you been doing that? 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.

You say, "That sounds pretty general to me. Can you give me specifics?" Well, in fact, that's exactly what God does next in His Word. In general terms we must put Christ first. In specific terms, here's how we do it...

## II. Specific guidelines: We please Christ by fulfilling our 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 terms. 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 party first. For our purposes we'll look at the first four groups.

If we truly want to put Christ first, it'll show up in our families. We'll seek to please Christ by accepting the family roles He's designed. Here they are.

**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 biblical observations. Observation #1--According to the Bible...

1. *Differing roles are not bad.* Equality and submissiveness can co-exist. Is that true? Listen to 1

Corinthians 11:3, "The head of Christ is God." And 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. 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.

Biblical observation #2...

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*." And 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).

Quite frankly, here's why a lot of families are in trouble these days. We've flip-flopped roles.

As we'll see in a moment, the husband's role is to be a loving leader. So when a man refuses to be a loving leader in his home, you can be sure that home is in trouble. Men, do you pray with your wife and children? Do you take the spiritual lead by saying to your family, "Come on, we're going to church (and do you make sure everyone's in bed at a decent hour on Saturday night so they're ready for Sunday morning?)."? Men, we're to be the pacesetters in our homes. We're to say, "In this home we're going to put Christ first." When we fail to do that, we're abandoning our God-given role.

The same occurs when a woman undermines her husband's leadership--when she competes with him rather than seeking to complement him. When she says, "My dad could have done better."

Furthermore, parents and children can flip-flop their roles, too. Parents, does your home revolve around your children? What do you do when you're talking to your spouse and your child interrupts? Yes, we're to love and nurture our children. But we're also to teach them that the world does not revolve around them.

The subject of roles is absolutely critical. It's not a question of worth. In Christ, we're equal. But in function, we must accept 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 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.

God holds the husband primarily responsible for what happens in the home. Interestingly, in the broader sense of relationships in the church, there's to be a mutual submission (Eph. 5:21).

God designed the wife to have a support role in the family. What's to be her motivation as she fulfills it? The verse concludes, "As is fitting in the Lord." Again, her aim isn't just family harmony. It's to please Christ. It's not, "Well, if I do this, things are more pleasant [implying, if things aren't more pleasant, why not flip flop roles?]. The goal in fulfilling our roles is to please Christ and thereby put Him on display. For the wife, it's "fitting in the Lord."

**B. Husbands are given two commands (19).** God gave one command to the wives, and two to the husbands. Here what a husband is to do.

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. You can't love someone if you don't feel anything for them."

Really? One of the reasons we fail to love as we ought is because we let our feelings get in the way. Don't misunderstand. Biblical love is not a cold, sterile, dutiful sort of thing. Agape love involves warmth and emotion, but it's the result, not the basis of it.

That's why if right now you don't love your spouse, you can *learn* to love her. Indeed, you *must*. The Bible commands you to do so.

The Greek term for love used here is *agapao*. It's choosing to do what's right and in the best interest of the other person. It's choosing to make sacrifices for the good of the other person. It doesn't depend on feelings.

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. What's more, Ephesians 5:28 instructs husbands to love their wives as their own bodies.

Wiersbe is right, "Headship is not dictatorship or lordship. It is loving leadership." A husband is commanded to love his life. Here's what he's *not* to do.

2. *He is not to be bitter towards her.* "Do not be harsh with them," is how the NIV puts it. Bitterness is the opposite of sweetness. A bitter husband will look on his wife as a servant, an object to satisfy his petty whims (Gromacki).

Bitterness can creep into a relationship slowly but surely. 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 Pet. 3:7 instructs) and meeting them. A supportive wife and a loving husband make a beautiful team.

**C. Children are to obey their parents (20).** "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." The term "children" depicts those who are still dependent on their parents for their daily physical needs (Gromacki, 149). What does God expect of children in relationship to parents? Obedience.

The command is straightforward. If you are a young person, your God-given role is to obey your parents. Two things ought to be true of your obedience.

1. *Do it constantly and completely.* The word *hupakouete* literally means "to hear under." A child who obeys is one who puts himself under the authority of his parents, listens to what they say, and does as he is told without complaint or resistance (Gromacki). Such obedience is to be rendered to "parents," the plural indicating both parents. And it's to be "in all things," that is, unless God's higher authority would be violated. Secondly...

2. *Do it to please the Lord.* Notice again, the key to good family relationships is remembering the Lord. We do what we do to please Him. In this case, He is pleased when a child renders constant and complete obedience to his parents. Always remember, Jesus Christ is an ever-present guest in your home.

**D. Fathers are told what not to do (21).** "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged." The term "fathers" could refer to the male parent only, or apply to both parents. Paul specifies what fathers are not to do with their children.

1. *Don't provoke them.* 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. In Proverbs 13:24 God says, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him." God's way for dealing with problems is so good. It's not the silent treatment. It's not months 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."

What happens if you provoke 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 make our children better or bitter with our words. 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.

Did you know that Martin Luther's father was so stern to him (acc. to Barclay, 163) that all his days Luther found it difficult to pray, "Our Father." 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 are the roles God has given us, and remember, He gave them to us so we can put Christ on display in our homes.

Perhaps you're thinking, "I can't put Christ on display. I don't even know Him." If so, please know that we're glad you are here today. We love it when people who do not know Christ come to our services, and here's why. The Bible says that God is seeking and saving lost people. Human beings are lost because we have violated God's Law—that's what sin is. And that's why God sent His Son to earth. The Son of God became a man so that He might rescue sinful men and women from their bondage. He lived a perfect life, died on the cross as a substitute for sinners, and then rose again from the dead. He sent the Holy Spirit who is in the world today, searching for the lost, bringing them under the sound of His Word, convicting them of their need to repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

Yes, we're thrilled you are here! We'd love to have you join us as we seek to put Christ on display in our lives. But first, you must come to know Him as your Savior.

And now, brothers and sisters in Christ, let me ask you a question. In light of what you have heard from God's Word today...

Response: What's needed in your home?

My challenge is twofold...

1. *Take care of first things first.* Make sure you are putting Christ first. Resolve today to put Him #1 in your life and family. Is there evidence that He is? Are you seeking to please Him by accepting the family roles He's established? Take care of first things first. Then...

2. *Thank the Lord 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 that's not all. Through Jesus Christ we have grace for family living. It's ours for the asking.

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\*\*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.